







THE HOUSE OF THE WHITE SHADOWS

By

B. L. FARJEON

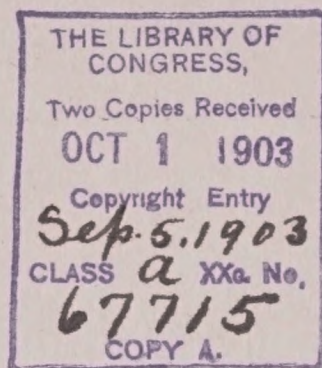
Author of

Samuel Boyd of Catchpole Square,
Grif, Toilers of Babylon, etc.



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ALL THE
BOOKS TO

BENJAMIN LEOPOLD FARJEON

WE regret to learn that since this book was sent to press in this country, its gifted author has passed away in London at the ripe age of 70 years. It seems appropriate and indeed necessary to preface "The House of the White Shadows," on its appearance in America, with a brief account of Mr. Farjeon's life and literary career. Considering his popularity it is astonishing how very little is generally known regarding this author's personality. The ordinary reference books, if not altogether silent respecting him, have but a line or two, giving the date of his birth with perhaps a list of two or three of his principal novels. It is sincerely to be hoped that a competent biography will ultimately appear, affording to his very many admirers some satisfactory account of a man who has given the world more than twenty-five remarkable works of fiction.

Mr. Farjeon was an Englishman, having been born in London in 1833. At an early age he went to Australia and from thence to New Zealand. It would be exceedingly interesting to learn how he employed himself in those colonies. We know that he engaged in a journalistic venture in Dunedin, but how long it continued or how he fed his intellectual life during the years which intervened, until he published his first novel in London, we know little or nothing. At all events he returned home and launched his first literary venture in London in 1870. It was called "Grif, a Story of Australian Life." This story proved to be eminently successful, and probably determined its author's future career. He produced "Joshua Marvel" in 1871; "London's Heart" in

1873 ; "Jessie Trim" in 1874, and a long list of powerful novels ending with "Samuel Boyd of Catchpole Square," published only two or three years ago. Some of these works, like "Blade o' Grass," "Bread and Cheese and Kisses," "Great Porter Square," etc., have been very popular both in England and the United States, passing through many editions.

Mr. Farjeon's style is remarkable for its vivid realism. The London "Athenæum" in a long and appreciative review styles him "a master of realistic fiction." On account of his sentiment and minute characterization he is regarded as a follower of the method of Dickens. No writer since that master can picture like Farjeon the touching and pathetic type of innocent childhood, pure in spite of miserable and squalid surroundings. He can paint, too, a scene of sombre horror so vividly that even Dickens himself could scarcely emulate its realism.

Mr. Farjeon visited the United States several times during his long life. Americans have always regarded him with kindly feelings. Perhaps this kindliness was somewhat increased when it became generally known that he had married a daughter of America's genial actor, Joseph Jefferson.

"The House of the White Shadows" is published in this country by arrangement with Messrs. Hutchinson & Co., of London, who have been Mr. Farjeon's publishers in Great Britain for many years.

THE PUBLISHERS.

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THE HOUSE OF WHITE SHADOWS

BOOK I.—THE TRIAL OF GAUTRAN.

CHAPTER I

ONLY A FLOWER-GIRL

THE feverish state of excitement into which Geneva was thrown was not caused by a proclamation of war, a royal visit, a social revolution, a religious wave, or an avalanche. It was simply that a man was on his trial for murder.

There is generally in Geneva a rational if not a philosophic foundation for a social upheaving; unlike the people of most other countries, the population do not care to play a blind game of follow my leader. They prefer to think for themselves, and their leaders must be men of mark. Intellect is passionately welcomed; pretenders find their proper level.

What, then, in a simple trial for murder, had caused the excitement? Had the accused moved in a high station, was he a poet, a renowned soldier, a philanthropist, a philosopher, or a priest loved for his charities, and the purity of his life? None of these; he was Gautran, a woodman, and a vagabond of the lowest type. It would be natural, therefore, to seek for an explanation in the social standing of his victim. A princess, probably, or at least a lady of quality? On the contrary. A common flower-girl, who had not two pair of shoes to her feet.

Seldom had a trial taken place in which the interest manifested had been so absorbing. While it was pro-

ceeding, the questions which men and women asked freely of each other were :

“ What news from the court-house? ”

“ How many days longer is it likely to last? ”

“ Has the monster confessed? ”

“ What will the verdict be? ”

“ Do you think it possible he can escape? ”

“ Why did the famous Advocate undertake the defence? ”

In fashionable assemblies, and in *cafés* where the people drank their lager and red wine ; in clubs and workshops ; on steamboats and diligences ; in the fields and vineyards ; on high-roads and bye-roads—the trial of Gautran formed the principal topic of conversation and debate, to the almost utter exclusion of trade, and science, and politics, and of a new fashion in hats which was setting the women of adjacent countries crazy. So animated were the discussions that the girl lying in her grave might have been supposed to be closely related to half the inhabitants of Geneva, instead of having been, as she was, a comparative stranger in the town, with no claim upon any living Genevese on the score of kinship. The evidence against the prisoner was overwhelming, and it appeared as though a spirit of personal hatred had guided its preparation. With deadly patience and skill the prosecution had blocked every loophole of escape. Gautran was fast in the meshes, and it was observed that his counsel, the Advocate, in the line he adopted, elicited precisely the kind of evidence which—in the judgment of those who listened to him now for the first time—strengthened the case against the man he was defending.

“ Ah,” said those observers, “ this great Advocate shares the horror of the murderer and his crime, and has undertaken the defence for the purpose of ensuring a conviction.”

A conclusion which could only occur to uninformed minds.

There were others—among them the prosecuting counsel, the judge, and the members of the legal profession who thronged the court—who, with a better knowledge of the Advocate’s marvellous resources, and the subtle

quality of his intellect, were inspired with the gravest doubts as to the result of the trial. This remarkable man, who gazed before him with calm, thoughtful eyes, whose face was a mask upon which no trace of inward emotion could be detected, was to them at once a source of perplexity and admiration. Instances were cited of trials in which he had been engaged, in the course of which he had seemed to play so directly into the hands of his antagonists that defeat was not dreamt of until they were startled by the discovery that he had led them into an ambush where, at the supreme moment, victory was snatched from their grasp. And, when it was too late to repair their error, they were galled by the reflection that the Advocate had so blinded their judgment, and so cloaked his designs, that he had compelled them to contribute largely to their own discomfiture.

It was in the acknowledgment of these extraordinary powers that the doubt arose whether Gautran would not slip through the hands of justice. Every feature of the case and the proceedings, whether picturesque or horrible, that afforded scope for illustration by pen and pencil was pressed into the service of the public—whose appetite for such fare is regarded as immoderate and not over-nice—by special correspondents and artists. Descriptions and sketches of the river and its banks, of the poor home of the unfortunate flower-girl, of the room in which she had slept, of her habits and demeanour, of her dress, of her appearance alive and dead; and, as a contrast, of Gautran and his vile surroundings—not a detail was allowed to escape. It was impossible, without favour or influence, to obtain admission to the court in which the trial was held, and, could seats have been purchased, a higher price would willingly have been paid for them than the most celebrated actress or prima donna could have commanded. Murders are common enough, but this crime had feverishly stirred the heart of the community, and its strangest feature was that the excitement was caused, not so much by the murder itself, as by an accidental connection which imparted to it its unparalleled interest.

The victim was a young girl seventeen years of age, who, until a few months before her cruel and untimely

death, had been a stranger in the neighbourhood. Nothing was known of the story of her life. When she first appeared in the suburbs of Geneva she was accompanied by a woman much older than herself, and two facts made themselves immediately apparent. That a strong attachment existed between the new-comers, and that they were very poor. The last circumstance was regarded as a sufficient indication that they belonged to the lower classes. The name of the younger of the women was Madeline, the name of the elder Pauline.

That they became known simply by these names, Madeline and Pauline, was not considered singular by those with whom they consorted; as they presented themselves, so they were accepted. Some said they came from the mountains, some from the plains, but this was guess-work. Their dress did not proclaim their canton, and they brought nothing with them to betray them.

To the question asked of them, "What are you?" Pauline replied, "Cannot you see? We are common working people."

They hired a room in a small cottage for three francs a month, and paid the first month's rent in advance, and their landlady was correct in her surmise that these three francs constituted nearly the whole of their wealth. She was curious to know how they were going to live, for although they called themselves working people, the younger of the two did not seem to be fitted for hard work, or to be accustomed to it.

For a few days they did nothing, and then their choice of avocation was made. They sold flowers in the streets and *cafés* of Geneva, and gained no more than a scanty living thereby.

The woman in whose cottage they lived said she was surprised that they did not make a deal of money, as much because of Madeline's beauty as of their exquisite skill in arranging their posies.

Had Pauline traded alone it is likely that failure would have attended her, for notwithstanding that she was both comely and straight-made, there was always in her eyes the watchful look of one who mistrusts honeyed words from strangers, and sees a snare in complimentary phrases.

It was otherwise with Madeline, in whose young life Nature's fairest season was opening, and it would have been strange indeed if her smiling face and winning manners had not attracted custom. This smiling face and these winning manners were not an intentional part of the trade she followed; they were natural gifts.

Admiration pursued her, not only from those in her own station in life, but from some who occupied a higher, and many an insidious proposal was whispered in her ear whose poisonous flattery would have beguiled her to her ruin. If she had not had in Pauline a staunch and devoted protector, it is hard to say whether she could have resisted temptation, for her nature was singularly gentle and confiding; but her faithful companion was ever on the alert, and no false wooer could hope to win his way to Madeline's heart while Pauline was near.

One gave gold for flowers, and was about to depart with a smile at the success of his first move, when Pauline, with her hand on his sleeve, stopped his way.

"You have made a mistake," she said, tendering the gold; "the flowers you have taken are worth but half-a-franc."

"There is no mistake," he said airily; "the gold is yours for beauty's sake."

"I prefer silver," she said, gazing steadily at him, "for fair dealing's sake."

He took back his gold and gave her silver, with a taunting remark that she was a poor hand at her trade. She made no reply to this, but there was a world of meaning in her eyes as she turned to Madeline with a look of mingled anxiety and tenderness. And yet she desired money, yearningly desired it, for the sake of her young charge; but she would only earn it honestly, or receive it from those of whom she had a right to ask.

She guarded Madeline as a mother guards her young, and their affection for each other grew into a proverb. Certainly no harm could befall the young flower-girl while Pauline was by her side. Unhappily a day arrived when the elder of the women was called away for a while. They parted with tears and kisses, never to meet again!

CHAPTER II

THE ARRIVAL OF THE ADVOCATE

AMONG those whom Madeline's beauty had attracted was a man in a common way of life, Gautran, a woodman, who followed her with dogged persistence. That his company was distasteful to this bright young creature could not be doubted, but he was not to be shaken off, and his ferocity of character deterred others from approaching the girl when he was present. Many times had he been heard to say, "Madeline belongs to me; let me see who is bold enough to dispute it." And again and again that it would go hard with the man who stepped between him and the girl he loved. Even Pauline was loth to anger him, and seemed to stand in fear of him. This was singular enough, for when he and Madeline were seen together, people would say, "There go the wolf and the lamb."

This wretch it was who stood accused of the murder of the pretty flower-girl.

Her body had been found in the River Rhone, with marks of violence upon it, and a handkerchief tightly twisted round its neck. The proofs of a cruel murder were incontestable, and suspicion fell immediately upon Gautran, who was the last person known to be in Madeline's company. Evidence of his guilt was soon forthcoming. He was madly, brutally in love with her, and madly, brutally jealous of her. On the night of the murder they had been seen walking together on the bank of the river; Gautran had been heard to speak in a high tone, and his exclamation, "I will kill you! I will kill you!" was sworn to by witnesses; and the handkerchief round her neck belonged to him. A thousand damning details were swiftly accumulated, all pointing to the wretch's guilt, and it was well for him that he did not fall into the hands of the populace. So incensed were they against him that they would have torn him to pieces.

Not in all Geneva could there be found a man or a

woman who, by the holding up of a finger, would have besought mercy for him. Regret was openly expressed that the death punishment for murder was not lawful, some satisfaction, however, being derived from the reflection that in times gone by certain heinous crimes had brought upon the criminals a punishment more terrible than death.

“They should chain the monster by the waist,” said a man, “so that he cannot lie down, and can only move one step from the stake. Gautran deserves worse than that.”

But while he lay in prison, awaiting the day of trial, there arrived in Geneva an Advocate of renown, who had travelled thither with his wife in search of much needed repose from years of continuous mental toil. This man was famous in many countries; he was an indefatigable and earnest worker, and so important were his services deemed that phenomenal fees were frequently paid to secure them. But notwithstanding the exceeding value of his time he had been known to refuse large sums of money in cases offered to him, in order to devote himself to others which held out no prospect of pecuniary reward.

Wealthy, and held in almost exaggerated esteem, both for his abilities and the cold purity of his life, it was confidently predicted that the highest honours of the state were in store for him, and it was ungrudgingly admitted—so far above his peers did he stand—that the loftiest office would be dignified by association with his name. The position he had attained was due as much to his intense enthusiasm in the cause he championed as to his wondrous capacity for guiding it to victory. As leader of a forlorn hope he was unrivalled. He had an insatiable appetite for obstacles; criminal cases of great moment, in which life and liberty were in imminent peril, and in which there was a dark mystery to be solved, possessed an irresistible fascination for him. Labour such as this was a labour of love, and afforded him the keenest pleasure. The more intricate the task the closer his study of it; the deeper the mystery the greater his patience in the unravelling of it; the more powerful the odds against him the more determined his exertions to win the battle. His microscopic, penetrating mind detected the minutest

flaw, seized the smallest detail likely to be of advantage to him, and frequently from the most trivial thread he spun a strand so strong as to drag the ship that was falling to pieces to a safe and secure haven. His satisfaction at these achievements was unbounded, but he rarely allowed an expression of exultation to escape him. His outward tranquillity, even in supreme crises, was little less than marvellous. His nerve was of iron, and to his most intimate associates his inner life was a sealed book.

Accompanied by his wife, the Advocate entered Geneva, and alighted at one of the principal hotels, four days before that on which the trial of Gautran was to commence.

CHAPTER III

THE ADVOCATE'S WIFE INSISTS UPON HAVING HER WAY

THEIR arrival was expected. The moment they were shown into a private room the proprietor of the hotel waited upon them, and with obsequious bows welcomed them to Geneva.

"A letter has been awaiting my lord," said this magnate, the whiteness of whose linen was dazzling; he had been considering all the morning whether he should address the great Advocate as "your lordship," or "your eminence," or "your highness," and had decided upon the first, "since yesterday evening."

The Advocate in silence received the letter, in silence read it, then handed it to his wife, who also read it, with a careless and supercilious air which deeply impressed the landlord.

"Will my lord and my lady," said this official, "honour us by remaining long in our town? The best rooms in the establishment are at their disposal."

The Advocate glanced at his wife, who answered for him:

"We shall remain for a few hours only."

Despair was expressed in the landlord's face as he left the room, overwhelmed with the desolation caused by this announcement.

The letter which he had delivered to the Advocate ran as follows :

“COMRADE, whom I have never seen, but intimately know, Welcome. Were it not that I am a cripple, and physically but half a man—represented, fortunately, by the upper moiety of my body—I should come in person to shake you by the hand. As it is, I must wait till you take up your quarters in Christian Almer’s villa in our quiet village, where I spend my days and nights, extracting what amusement I can from the foibles and weaknesses of my neighbours. My father was steward to Christian Almer’s father, and I succeeded him, for the reason that the office, during the latter years and after the death of the elder Almer, was a sinecure. Otherwise, another steward would have had to be found, for my labours lay elsewhere. But since the day on which I became a mere bit of animated lumber, unable of my own will to move about, and confined within the narrow limits of this sleepy valley, I have regarded the sinecure as an important slice of good fortune, albeit there was nothing whatever to do except to cause myself to be wheeled past Christian Almer’s villa on fine days, for the purpose of satisfying myself that no thief had run away with its rusty gates. Then came an urgent letter from young Almer, whom I have not beheld since he was a lad of nine or ten, begging of me to put the house in order for you and your lady, to whom I, as an old gallant, am already in spirit devoted. And when I heard that it was for you the work was to be done, doubly did I deem myself fortunate in not having thrown up the stewardship in my years of active life. All, then, is ready in the old house, which will be the more interesting to you from the fact of its not having been inhabited for nearly a generation. Comedies and tragedies have been enacted within its walls, as you doubtless know. Does Christian Almer come with you, and has he grown into the likeness of his father?—Your servant and brother,

“PIERRE LAMONT.”

“Who is this Pierre Lamont?” asked his wife.

"Once a famous lawyer," replied the Advocate; "compelled some years ago to relinquish the pursuit of his profession by reason of an accident which crippled him for life. You do not wish to stop in Geneva, then?"

"No," said the beautiful woman who stood before him, his junior by five-and-twenty years; "there is nothing new to be seen here, and I am dying with impatience to take possession of Mr. Almer's villa. I have been thinking of nothing else for the last week."

"Captivated by the name it bears."

"Perhaps. The House of White Shadows! Could anything be more enticing? Why was it so called?"

"I cannot tell you. Until lately, indeed when this holiday was decided upon"—he sighed as he uttered the word "holiday"; an indication that he was not accepting it in a glad spirit—"I was not aware that Almer owned a villa hereabouts. Do not forget, Adelaide, that he cautioned you against accepting an offer made in a rash moment."

"What more was needed to set me longing for it? 'Here is a very beautiful book,' said Mr. Almer, 'full of wonderful pictures; it is yours, if you like—but, beware, you must not open it.' Think of saying that to a woman!"

"You are a true daughter of Eve. Almer's offer was unwise; his caution still more unwise."

"The moment he warned me against the villa, I fell in love with it. I shall discover a romance there."

"I, too, would warn you against it——"

"You are but whetting my curiosity," she interrupted playfully.

"Seriously, though. Master Lamont, in his letter, says that the house has not been inhabited for nearly a generation——"

"There must be ghosts there," she said, again interrupting him. "It will be delightful."

"And Master Lamont's remark," continued the Advocate, "that there have been comedies and tragedies enacted within its walls is not a recommendation."

"I have heard you say, Edward, that they are enacted within the walls of the commonest houses."

"But this particular house has been for so long a time

deserted! I am in ignorance of the stories attached to it; that they are in some sense unpleasant is proved by Almer's avoidance of the place. What occurs to me is that, were it entirely desirable, Almer would not have made it a point to shun it."

"Christian Almer is different from other men; that is your own opinion of him."

"True; he is a man dominated by sentiment; yet there appears to be something deeper than mere sentiment in his consistent avoidance of the singularly named House of White Shadows."

"According to Master Lamont's letter he has been to some trouble to make it agreeable to us. Indeed, Edward, you cannot argue me out of having my own way."

"If the house is gloomy, Adelaide——"

"I will brighten it. Can I not?" she asked in a tone so winning that it brought a light into his grave face.

"You can, for me, Adelaide," he replied; "but I am not thinking of myself. I would not willingly sadden a heart as joyous as yours. You must promise, if you are not happy there, to seek with me a more cheerful retreat."

"You can dismiss your fears, Edward. I shall be happy there. All last night I was dreaming of white shadows. Did they sadden me? No. I woke up this morning in delightful spirits. Is that an answer to your forebodings?"

"When did you not contrive to have your own way? I have some banking business to do in Geneva, and I must leave you for an hour." She nodded and smiled at him. Before he reached the door he turned and said: "Are you still resolved to send your maid away? She knows your wants so well, and you are so accustomed to her, that her absence might put you to inconvenience. Had you not better keep her with you till you see whether you are likely to be suited at Almer's house?"

"Edward," she said gaily, "have I not told you a hundred times, and have you not found out for yourself a hundred and a hundred times again, that your wife is a very wilful woman? I shall love to be inconvenienced; it will set my wits to work. But indeed I happen to know that there is a pretty girl in the villa, the old house-

keeper's granddaughter, who was born to do everything I wish done in just the way I wish it done."

"Child of impulse and fancy," he said, kissing her hand, and then her lips, in response to a pouting invitation, "it is well for you that you have a husband as serious as myself to keep guard and watch over you. What is the thought that has suddenly entered your head?"

"Can you read a woman's thoughts?" she asked in her lightest manner.

"I can judge by signs. What was your thought, Adelaide?"

"A foolish thought. To keep guard and watch over me, you said. The things are so different. The first is a proof of love, the second of suspicion."

"A logician, too," he said with a pleased smile; "the air here agrees with you." So saying he left her, and he moment he was beyond the reach of her personal influence his native manner asserted itself, and his features assumed their usual grave expression. As he was descending the stairs of the hotel he was accosted by a woman, the maid he had advised his wife to keep.

"I beg your pardon, sir," she said; "but may I ask why I am discharged?"

"Certainly not of me," he replied stiffly; "you are my wife's servant. She has her reasons."

"She has not made me acquainted with them," said the woman discontentedly. "Will you?"

He saw that she was in an ill-temper, and although he was not a man to tolerate insolence, he was attentive to trifles.

"I do not interfere with my wife's domestics. She engages whom she pleases, and discharges whom she pleases."

"But to do right, sir, that is everyone's affair. I am discharged suddenly, without notice, and without having committed a fault. Until this morning I am perfection; no one can dress my lady like me, no one can arrange her hair so admirably. That is what she says to me continually. Why, then, am I discharged? I ask my lady why, and she says, for her convenience."

"She has paid you, has she not?"

"Oh yes, and has given me money to return home. But it is not that. It is that it hurts me to be suddenly discharged. It is to my injury when I seek another situation. I shall be asked why I left my last. To speak the truth, I must say that I did not leave, that I was discharged. I shall be asked why, and I shall not be able to say."

"Has she not given you a character?"

"Yes; it is not that I complain of; it is being suddenly discharged."

"I cannot interfere, mistress. You have no reasonable cause for complaint. You have a character, and you are well paid; that should content you."

He turned from her, and she sent her parting words after him:

"My lady has her reasons! I hope they will be found to be good ones, and that you will find them so. Do you hear?—that you will find them so!"

He paid no further heed to her, and entering his carriage drove to the Rue de la Corraterie, to the business house of Jacob Hartrich, and was at once admitted to the banker's private room.

CHAPTER IV

JACOB HARTRICH, THE BANKER, GIVES HIS REASONS FOR BELIEVING GAUTRAN THE WOODMAN GUILTY OF THE MURDER OF MADELINE

JACOB HARTRICH, by birth a Jew, had reached his sixtieth year, and was as hale and strong as a man of forty. His face was bland and full-fleshed, his eyes bright and, at times, joyous, his voice mellow, his hands fat and finely-shaped, and given to a caressing petting of each other, denoting satisfaction with themselves and the world in general. His manners were easy and self-possessed—a characteristic of his race. He was a gentleman and a man of education.

He gazed at the Advocate with admiration; he had an intense respect for men who had achieved fame by force of intellect.

“Mr. Almer,” he said, “prepared me for your arrival, and is anxious that I should forward your views in every possible way. I shall be happy to do so, and, if it is in my power, to contribute to the pleasure of your visit.”

“I thank you,” said the Advocate, with a courteous inclination of his head. “When did you last see Mr. Almer?”

“He called upon me this day three weeks—for a few minutes only, and only concerning your business.”

“He is always thoughtful and considerate. I suppose he was on his road to Paris when he called upon you.”

“No; he had no intention of going to Paris. I believe he had been for some time in the neighbourhood of Geneva before he favoured me with a visit. He is still here.”

“Here!” exclaimed the Advocate, in a tone of pleasure and surprise.

“At least in Switzerland.”

“In what part?”

“I cannot inform you, but from the remarks he let fall, I should say in the mountains, where tourists are not likely to penetrate.” He paused a moment before he continued: “Mr. Almer spoke of you, in terms it was pleasant to hear, as his closest, dearest friend.”

“We are friends in the truest sense of the word.”

“Then I may speak freely to you. During the time he was with me I was impressed by an unusual strangeness in him. He was restless and ill at ease; his manner denoted that he was either dissatisfied with himself or was under some evil influence. I expressed my surprise to him that he had been for some time in this neighbourhood without calling upon me, but he did not offer any explanation of his neglect. He told me, however, that he was tired of the light, the gaiety, and the bustle of cities, and that it was his intention to seek some solitude to endeavour to rid himself of a terror which had taken possession of him. No sooner had he made this strange declaration than he strove, in hurried words, to make light of it, evidently anxious that it should leave no impression upon my mind. I need scarcely say he did not succeed. I have frequently thought of that declaration and of Christian Almar in connection with it.”

The Advocate smiled and shook his head.

"Mr. Almer is given to fantastic expression. If you knew him as well as I do you would be aware that he is prone to magnify trifles, and likely to raise ghosts of the conscience for the mere pleasure of laying them. His nature is of that order which suffers keenly, but I am not disposed on that account to pity him. There are men who would be most unhappy unless they suffered."

"My dear sir," said Jacob Hartrich, "I have known Christian Almer since he was a child. I knew his father, a gentleman of great attainments, and his mother, a refined and exquisitely beautiful woman. His child-life probably made a sad impression upon him, but he has mixed with the world, and there is a bridge of twenty years between then and now. A great change has taken place in him, and not for the better. There is certainly something on his mind."

"There is something on most men's minds. I have remarked no change in Mr. Almer to cause me uneasiness. He is the same high-minded gentleman I have ever known him to be. He is exquisitely sensitive, responsive to the lightest touch; those who are imbued with such qualities suffer keenly and enjoy keenly."

"The thought occurred to me that he might have sustained a monetary loss, but I dismissed it."

"A monetary loss would rather exalt than depress him. He is rich—it would have been a great happiness for him if he had been poor. What are termed misfortunes are sometimes real blessings; many fine natures are made to halt on their way by worldly prosperity. Had Christian Almer been born in the lower classes he would have found a worthy occupation; he would have made a name for himself, and in all probability would have won a wife—who would have idolised him. He is a man whom a woman might worship."

"You have given me a clue," said Jacob Hartrich; "he has met with a disappointment in love."

"I think not; had he met with such a disappointment I should most surely have heard of it from his own lips."

Interesting as this conversation was to both the speakers it had now come to a natural break, and Jacob Hartrich,

diverging from it, inquired whether the Advocate's visit was likely to be a long one.

"I have pledged myself," said the Advocate somewhat wearily, "to remain here for at least three months."

"Rest is a necessary medicine." The Advocate nodded absently. "Pray excuse me while I attend to your affairs. Here are the local and other papers."

He left the room, and returning soon afterwards found the Advocate engaged in the perusal of a newspaper in which he appeared to be deeply interested.

"Your business," said Jacob Hartrich, "will occupy about twenty minutes. There are some trifling formalities to be gone through with respect to signatures and stamps. If you are pressed for time I will send to you at your hotel."

"With your permission I will wait," said the Advocate, laying aside the paper with a thoughtful air.

Jacob Hartrich glanced at the paper, and saw the heading of the column which the Advocate had perused, "The Murder of Madeline the Flower-girl."

"You have been reading the particulars of this shocking deed."

"I have read what is there written."

"But you are familiar with the particulars; everybody has read them."

"I am the exception, then. I have seen very few newspapers lately."

"It was a foul and wicked murder."

"It appears so, from this bare recital."

"The foulest and most horrible within my remembrance. Ah! where will not the passions of men lead them?"

"A wide contemplation. Were men to measure the consequences of their acts before they committed them, certain channels of human events which are now exceedingly wide and turbulent would become narrow and peaceful. It was a girl who was murdered?"

"Yes."

"Young?"

"Barely seventeen."

"Pretty?"

"Very pretty."

"Had she no father to protect her?"

"No."

"Nor mother?"

"No—as far as is known."

"A flower-girl, I gather from the account."

"Yes. I have occasionally bought a posy of her—poor child!"

"Did she trade alone?"

"She had a companion, an elderly woman, who, unhappily, left her a few days before the murder."

"Deserted her?"

"No; it was an amicable parting, intended to last but a short time, I believe. It is not known what called her away."

"This young flower-girl—was she virtuous?"

"Undoubtedly, in my belief. She was most modest and child-like."

"But susceptible to flattery. You hesitate. Why? Do you not judge human passions by human standards? She was young, pretty, in humble circumstances; her very opposite would be susceptible to flattery; therefore, she."

"Why, yes, of course; I hesitated because it would pain me to say anything concerning her which might be construed into a reproach."

"In such matters there is but one goal to steer for—the truth. I perceive that a man, Gautran, is in prison, charged with the murder."

"A man?" exclaimed Jacob Hartrich, with indignant warmth. "A monster, rather! Some refined punishment should be devised to punish him for his crime."

"His crime! I have, then, been reading an old paper." The Advocate referred to the date. "No—it is this morning's."

"I see your point, but the proofs of the monster's guilt are irrefragable."

"What proofs? The statements of newspaper reporters—the idle and mischievous tattle of persons who cannot be put into the witness-box?"

"It is well that you express yourself to me privately on

this matter. In public it would not be credited that you were in earnest."

"Then the facts are lost sight of that the man has to be tried, that his guilt or innocence has yet to be established."

"The law cannot destroy facts."

"The law establishes facts, which are often in danger of being perverted by man's sympathies and prejudices. Are you acquainted with this Gautran?"

"I have no knowledge of him except from report."

"And having no knowledge of him, except from report, you form an opinion upon hearsay, and condemn him offhand. It is justice itself, therefore, that is on its trial, not a man accused of a frightful deed. *He* is already judged. It is stated in the newspaper that the man's appearance is repulsive."

"He is hideous."

"Then you *have* seen him."

"No."

"Calmly consider what value can be placed upon your judgment under the circumstances. You say the girl was pretty. Her engaging manners have tempted you to buy posies of her, not always when you needed them. In making this statement of a fact which, trivial as it appears to be, is of importance, I judge a human action by a human standard. Thus, beauty on one side, and a forbidding countenance on the other, may be the means of contributing—nay, of leading—to a direct miscarriage of justice. This should be prevented; justice must have a clear course, which must not be blocked and choked up by passion and prejudice. The opinion you express of Gautran's guilt may be entertained by others to whom he is also a stranger."

"My opinion is universal."

"The man, therefore, is universally condemned before he is called upon to answer the charge brought against him. Amidst this storm, in the wild fury of which reason has lost its proper functions, where shall a jury be found to calmly weigh the evidence on either side, and to judge, with ordinary fairness, a miserable wretch accused of a foul crime?"

"Gautran is a vagabond," said Jacob Hartrich feebly,

feeling as though the ground were giving way under his feet, "of the lowest type."

"He is poor."

"Necessarily."

"And cannot afford to pay for independent legal aid."

"It is fortunate. He will meet with his deserts more surely and swiftly."

"You can doubtless call to mind instances of innocent persons being accused of crimes they did not commit, and being made to suffer."

"There is no fear in the case of Gautran."

"Let us hope not," said the Advocate, whose voice during the conversation had been perfectly passionless, "and in the meantime, do not lose sight of this principle. Were Gautran the meanest creature that breathes, were he the most repulsive being on earth, he is an innocent man until he is declared guilty by the law. Equally so were he a man gifted with exceeding beauty of person, and bearing an honoured name. And of those two extremes, supposing both were found guilty of equal crimes, it is worthy of consideration, whether he who walks the gutters be not better entitled to a merciful sentence than he who lives on the heights."

At this moment a clerk brought some papers into the room. Jacob Hartrich looked over them, and handed them, with a roll of notes, to the Advocate, who rose and prepared to go.

"Have you a permanent address?" asked the banker.

"We take up our quarters at once," replied the Advocate, "at the House of White Shadows."

Jacob Hartrich gazed at him in consternation. "Christian Almer's villa! He made no mention of it to me."

"It was an arrangement entered into some time since. I have a letter from Master Pierre Lamont informing me that the villa is ready for us."

"It has been uninhabited for years, except by servants who have been kept there to preserve it from falling into decay. There are strange stories connected with that house."

"I have heard as much, but have not inquired into them."

The probability is that they arise from credulity or ignorance, the foundation of all superstition."

With that remark the Advocate took his leave.

CHAPTER V

FRITZ THE FOOL

AS the little wooden clock in the parlour of the inn of The Seven Liars struck the hour of five, Fritz the Fool ran through the open door, from which an array of bottles and glasses could be seen, and cried:

"They are coming—they are coming—the great Advocate and his lady—and will arrive before the cook can toss me up an omelette!"

And having thus delivered himself, Fritz ran out of the inn to the House of White Shadows, and swinging open the gates, cried still more loudly:

"Mother Denise! Dionetta, my pearl of pearls! Haste—haste! They are on the road, and will be here a lifetime before old Martin can straighten his crooked back!"

Within five minutes of this summons, there stood at the door of the inn of The Seven Liars, the customers who had been tippling therein, the host and hostess and their three children; and ten yards off, at the gates of the villa, Mother Denise, her pretty granddaughter, Dionetta, and old Martin, whose breathing came short and quick at the haste he had made to be in time to welcome the Advocate and his lady. The refrain of the breaking-up song sung in the little village school was dying away, and the children trooped out, and waited to witness the arrival. The schoolmaster was also there, with a look of relief on his face, and stood with his hand on the head of his favourite pupil. The news had spread quickly, and when the carriage made its appearance at the end of the lane, which shelved downward to the House of White Shadows, a number of villagers had assembled, curious to see the great lord and lady who intended to reside in the haunted house.

As the carriage drove up at the gates, the courier jumped down from his seat next to the driver, and opened the carriage door. The villagers pressed forward, and gazed in admiration at the beautiful lady, and in awe at the stern-faced gentleman who had selected the House of White Shadows for a holiday residence. There were those among them who, poor as they were, would not have undertaken to sleep in any one of the rooms in the villa for the value of all the watches in Geneva. There were, however, three persons in the small concourse of people who had no fears of the house. These were Mother Denise, the old housekeeper, her husband Martin, and Fritz the Fool.

Mother Denise, the oldest servant of the house, had been born there, and was ghost and shadow proof; so was her husband, now in his eighty-fifth year, whose body was like a bent bow stretched for the flight of the arrow, his soul. Not for a single night in sixty-eight years had Mother Denise slept outside the walls of the House of White Shadows; nothing did she know of the great world beyond, and nothing did she care; a staunch, faithful servant of the Almer family, conversant with its secret history, her duty was sufficient for her, and she had no desire to travel beyond the space which encompassed it. For forty-three years her husband had kept her company, and to neither, as they had frequently declared, had a supernatural visitant ever appeared. They had no belief whatever in the ghostly gossip.

Fool Fritz, on the contrary, averred that there was no mistake about the spiritual visitants; they appeared to him frequently, but he had no fear of them; indeed, he appeared to rather enjoy them. "They may come, and welcome," he said. "They don't strike, they don't bite, they don't burn. They reveal secrets which you would like nobody to find out. If it had not been for them, how should I have known about Karl and Mina kissing and courting at the back of the schoolhouse when everybody was asleep, or about Dame Walther and her sly bottle, or about Wolf Constans coming home at three in the morning with a dead lamb on his back—ah, and about many things you try and keep to yourselves? I don't mind

the shadows, not I." There was little in the village that Fritz did not know; all the scandal, all the love-making, all the family quarrels, all the secret doings—it was hard to keep anything from him; and the mystery was how he came to the knowledge of these matters. "He is in affinity with the spirits," said the village schoolmaster; "he is himself a ghost, with a fleshly embodiment. That is why the fool is not afraid." Truly Fritz the Fool was ghost-like in appearance, for his skin was singularly white, and his head was covered with shaggy white hair which hung low down upon his shoulders. From a distance he looked like an old man, but he had not reached his thirtieth year, and so clear were his eyes and complexion that, on a closer observance, he might have passed for a lad of half the years he bore. A shrewd knave, despite his title of fool.

Pretty Dionetta did not share his defiance of ghostly visitors. The House of White Shadows was her home, and many a night had she awoke in terror and listened with a beating heart to soft footsteps in the passage outside her room, and buried her head in the sheets to shut out the light of the moon which shone in at her window. Fritz alone sympathised with her. "Two hours before midnight," he would say to her; "then it was you heard them creeping past your door. You were afraid, of course—when one is all alone; I can prescribe a remedy for that—not yet, Dionetta, by-and-by. Till then, keep all men at a distance; avoid them; there is danger in them. If they look at you, frown, and lower your eyes. And to-night, when you go to bed, lock your door tight, and listen. If the spirits come again, I will charm them away; shortly after you hear their footsteps, I will sing a stave outside to trick them from your door. Then sleep in peace, and rely on Fritz the Fool."

Very timid and fearful of the supernatural was this country beauty, whom all the louts in the neighbourhood wanted to marry, and she alone, of those who lived in the House of White Shadows, welcomed the Advocate and his wife with genuine delight. Fool Fritz thought of secretly-enjoyed pleasures which might now be disturbed, Martin was too old not to dislike change, and Mother Denise was

by no means prepared to rejoice at the arrival of strangers; she would have been better pleased had they never shown their faces at the gates.

The Advocate and his wife stood looking around them, he with observant eyes and in silence, she with undisguised pleasure and admiration. She began to speak the moment she alighted.

"Charming! beautiful! I am positively in love with it. This morning it was but a fancy picture, now it is real. Could anything be more perfect? So peaceful, and quaint, and sweet! Look at those children peeping from behind their mother's gown—she can be no other than their mother—dirty, but how picturesque!—and the woman herself, how original! It is worth while being a woman like that, to stand as she does, with her children clinging to her. Why does Mr. Almer not like to live here? It is inexplicable, quite inexplicable. I could be happy here for ever—yes, for ever! Do you catch the perfume of the limes? It is delicious—delicious! It comes from the grounds; there must be a lime-tree walk there. And you," she said to the pretty girl at the gates, "you are Dionetta."

"Yes, my lady," said Dionetta, and marvelled how her name could have become known to the beautiful woman, whose face was more lovely than the face of the Madonna over the altar of the tiny chapel in which she daily prayed. It was not difficult to divine her thought, for Dionetta was Nature's child.

"You wonder who told me your name," said the Advocate's wife, smiling, and patting the girl's cheek with her gloved hand.

"Yes, my lady."

"It was a little bird, Dionetta."

"A little bird, my lady!" exclaimed Dionetta, her wonderment and admiration growing fast into worship. The lady's graceful figure, her pink and white face, her pearly teeth, her lovely laughing mouth, her eyes, blue as the most beautiful summer's cloud—Dionetta had never seen the like before.

"You," said the Advocate's wife, turning to the grandmother, "are Mother Denise."

"Yes, my lady," said the old woman; "this is my hus-

band, Martin. Come forward, Martin, come forward. He is not as young as he was, my lady."

"I know, I know; my little bird was very communicative. You are Fritz."

"The Fool," said the white-haired young man, approaching closer to the lady, and consequently closer to Dionetta, "Fritz the Fool. But that needn't tell against me, unless you please. I can be useful, if I care to be, and faithful, too, if I care to be."

"It depends upon yourself, then," said the lady, accepting the independent speech in good part, "not upon others."

"Mainly upon myself; but I have springs that can be set in motion, if one can only find out how to play upon them. I was told you were coming."

"Indeed!" with an air of pleasant surprise. "By whom, and when?"

"By whom? The white shadows. When? In my dreams."

"The white shadows! They exist then! Edward, do you hear?"

"It is not so, my lady," interposed Mother Denise, in ill-humour at the turn the conversation was taking; "the shadows do not exist, despite what people say. Fritz is over-fond of fooling."

"It is my trade," retorted Fritz. "I know what I know, grandmother."

"Is Fritz your grandson, then?" asked the Advocate's wife, of Mother Denise.

"Heaven forbid!" exclaimed Mother Denise.

"What is not," remarked Fritz sententiously, "may be. Bear that in mind, grandmother; I may remind you of it one day."

The Advocate, upon whom not a word that had passed had been lost, fixed his eyes upon Fritz, and said:

"A delusion can be turned to profit. You make use of these shadows."

"The saints forbid! They would burn me in brimstone. Yet," with a look both sly and vacant, "it would be a pity to waste them."

"You like to be called a fool. It pleases you."

"Why not?"

"Why, rather?"

"I might answer in your own words, that it can be turned to profit. But I am too great a fool to see in what way."

"You answer wisely. Why do you close your eyes?"

"I can see in the dark what I choose to see. When my eyes are open, I am their slave. When they are closed, they are mine—unless I dream."

The Advocate gazed for a moment or two in silence upon the white face with its closed eyes raised to his, and then said to his wife:

"Come, Adelaide, we will look at the house."

They passed into the grounds, accompanied by Mother Denise, Martin, and Dionetta. Fritz remained outside the gate, with his eyes still closed, and a smile upon his lips.

"Fritz," said the host of the inn of The Seven Liars, "do you know anything of the great man?"

Fritz rubbed his brows softly and opened his eyes.

"Take the advice of a fool, Peter Schelt. Speak low when you speak of him."

"You think he can hear us. Why, he is a hundred yards off by this time!"

Fritz pointed with a waving finger to the air above him.

"There are magnetic lines, neighbours, connecting him with everything he once sets eyes on. He can see without seeing, and hear without hearing."

"You speak in riddles, Fritz."

"Put it down to your own dulness, Peter Schelt, that you cannot understand me. Master Lamont, now—what would you say about him? That he lacks brains?"

"A long way from it. Master Lamont is the cleverest man in the valley."

"Not now," said Fritz, pointing with his thumb over his shoulder in the direction taken by the Advocate; "his master has come. Master Lamont is a great lawyer, but we have now a greater, one who is a more skilful cobbler with his tongue than Hans here is with his awl; he can so patch an old boot as to make it better than a new one, and look as close as you may, you will not see the seams. Listen, Master Schelt. When I stood there with my eyes

shut I had a dream of a stranger who was found murdered in your house. An awful dream, Peter. Gather round, neighbours, gather round. There lay the stranger dead on his bed, and over him stood you, Peter Schelt, with a bloody knife in your hand. People say you murdered him for his money, and it really seemed so, for a purse stuffed with gold and notes was found in your possession; you had the stranger's silver watch, too. Suspicious, was it not? It was looking so black against you that you begged the great man who has come among us to plead for you at your trial. You were safe enough, then. He told a rare tale. Forty years ago the stranger robbed your father; suddenly he was struck with remorse, and seeking you out, gave you back the money, and his silver watch in the bargain. He proved to everybody's satisfaction that, though you committed the murder, it was impossible you could be guilty. Don't be alarmed, Madame Schelt, it was only a dream."

"But are you sure I did it?" asked Peter Schelt, in no way disturbed by the bad light in which he was placed by Fritz's fancies.

"What matters? The great man got you off, and that is all you cared for. Look here, neighbours; if any of you have black goats that you wish changed into white, go to him; he can do it for you. Or an old hen that cackles and won't lay, go to him; she will cackle less, and lay you six eggs a day. He is, of all, the greatest."

"Ah," said a neighbour, "and what do you know of his lady wife?"

"What all of you should know, but cannot see, though it stares you in the face."

"Let us have it, Fritz."

"She is too fair. Christine," to a stout young woman close to him, "give thanks to the Virgin to-night that you were sent into the world with a cast in your eye, and that your legs grow thicker and crooked every day. *You* will never drive a man out of his senses with your beauty."

Fritz was compelled to beat a swift retreat, for Christine's arms were as thick as her legs, and they were raised to smite. Up the lane flew the fool, and Christine after him, amid the laughter of the villagers.

CHAPTER VI

MISTRESS AND MAID

IN the meantime the Advocate and his wife strolled through the grounds. Although it was evident that much labour had been bestowed upon them, there were signs of decay here and there which showed the need of a master mind; but as these traces were only to be met with at some distance from the villa itself, it was clear that they would not interfere with the comfort of the new arrivals. The house lay low, and the immediate grounds surrounding it were in good condition. There were orchards stocked with fruit-trees, and gardens bright with flowers. At a short distance from the house was an old *châlet* which had been built with great taste; it was newly painted, and much care had been bestowed upon a covered pathway which led to it from a side entrance to the House of White Shadows. The principal room in this *châlet* was a large studio, the walls of which were black. On the left wall—in letters which once were white, but which had grown yellow with age—was inscribed the legend, “The Grave of Honour.”

“How singular!” exclaimed the Advocate’s wife. “‘The Grave of Honour!’ What can be the meaning of it?”

But Mother Denise did not volunteer an explanation.

Near the end of the studio was an alcove, the space beyond being screened by a dead crimson curtain. Holding back the curtain, a large number of pictures were seen piled against the walls.

“Family pictures?” asked the Advocate’s wife, of Mother Denise.

“No, my lady,” was the reply; “they were painted by an artist, who resided and worked here for a year or so in the lifetime of the old master.”

By the desire of the lady the housekeeper brought a few of the pictures into the light. One represented a pleasure party of ladies and gentlemen dallying in summer woods; another, a lady lying in a hammock and

reaching out her arm to pluck some roses; two were companion pictures, the first subject being two persons who might have been lovers, standing among strewn flowers in the sunshine—the second subject showing the same figures in a different aspect; a cold grey sea divided them, on the near shore of which the man stood in an attitude of despair gazing across the waters to the opposite shore, on which stood the woman with a pale, grief-stricken face.

“The sentiment is strained,” observed the Advocate, “but the artist had talent.”

“A story could be woven out of them,” said his wife; “I feel as if they were connected with the house.”

Upon leaving the chalet they continued their tour through the grounds. Already the Advocate felt the beneficial effects of a healthy change. His eyes were clearer, his back straighter, he moved with a brisker step. Mother Denise walked in front, pointing out this and that, Martin hobbled behind, and Dionetta, encouraged thereto, walked by her new mistress's side.

“Dionetta,” said the Advocate's wife, “do you know that you have the prettiest name in the world?”

“Have I, my lady? I have never thought of it, but it is, if you say so.”

“But perhaps,” said the Advocate's wife, with a glance at the girl's bright face, “a man would not think of your name when he looked at you.”

“I am sure I cannot say, my lady; he would not think of me at all.”

“You little simpleton! I wish I had such a name; they ought to wait till we grow up, so that we might choose our own names. I should not have chosen Adelaide for myself.”

“Is that your name, my lady?”

“Yes—they could not have given me an uglier.”

“Nay,” said Dionetta, raising her eyes in mute appeal for forgiveness for the contradiction, “it is very sweet.”

“Repeat it, then. Adelaide.”

“May I, my lady?”

“Of course you may, if I wish you to. Let me hear you speak it.”

"Adelaide! Adelaide!" murmured Dionetta softly. The permission was as precious as the gift of a silver chain would have been. "My lady, it is pretty."

"Shall we change?" asked the Advocate's wife gaily.

"Can we?" inquired Dionetta in a solemn tone. "I would not mind if you wish it, and if it is right. I will ask the priest."

"No, do not trouble. Would you really like to change?"

"It would be so strange—and it might be a sin! If we cannot, it is of no use thinking of it."

"There is no sin in thinking of things; if there were, the world would be full of sin, and I—dear me, how much I should have to answer for! I should not like everyone to know my thoughts. What a quiet life you must live here, Dionetta!"

"Yes, my lady, it is quiet."

"Would you not prefer to live in a city?"

"I should be frightened, my lady. I have been only twice to Geneva, and there was no room in the streets to move about. I was glad to get back."

"No room to move about, simplicity! That is the delight of it. There are theatres, and music, and light, and life. You would not be frightened if you were with me?"

"Oh, no, my lady; that would be happiness."

"Are you not happy here?"

"Oh, yes, very happy."

"But you wish for something?"

"No, my lady; I have everything I want."

"Everything—positively everything?"

"Yes, my lady."

"There is one thing you must want, Dionetta, if you have it not already."

"May I know what it is?"

"Yes, child. Love."

Dionetta blushed crimson from forehead to throat, and the Advocate's wife laughed, and tapped her cheek.

"You are very pretty, Dionetta; it is right you should have a pretty name. Do you mean to tell me you have not a lover?"

"I have been asked, my lady," said the girl, in a tone so low that it could only just be heard.

"And you said 'yes'? Little one, I have caught you."

"My lady, I did not say 'yes.'"

"And the men were contented? They must be dolts. Really and truly, you have not a lover?"

"What can I say, my lady?" murmured Dionetta, her head bent down. "There are some who say they—love me."

"But you do not love them?"

"No, my lady."

"You would like to have one you could love?"

"One day, my lady, if I am so fortunate."

"I promise you," said the Advocate's wife with a blithe laugh, "that one day you will be so fortunate. Women were made for love—and men, too, or where would be the use? It is the only thing in life worth living for. Blushing again! I would give my jewel-case to be able to blush like you."

"I cannot help it, my lady. My face often grows red when I am quite alone."

"And thinking of love," added the Advocate's wife; "for what else should make it red? So you do think of things! I can see, Dionetta, that you and I are going to be great friends."

"You are very good, my lady, but I am only a poor peasant. I will serve you as well as I can."

"You knew, before I came, that you were to be my maid?"

"Yes, my lady. Master Lamont said it was likely. Grandmother did not seem to care that it should be so, but I wished for it, and now that she has seen you she must be glad for me to serve you."

"Why should she be glad, Dionetta?"

"My lady, it could not be otherwise," said Dionetta very earnestly; "you are so good and beautiful."

"Flatterer! Master Lamont—he is an old man?"

"Yes, my lady."

"There are some old men who are very handsome."

"He is not. He is small, and thin, and shrivelled up."

"Those are not the men for us, are they, little one?"

"But he has a voice like honey. I have heard many say so."

"That is something in his favour—or would be, if women were blind. So from this day you are my maid. You will be faithful, I am sure, and will keep my secrets. Mind that, Dionetta. You must keep my secrets."

"Have you any?" said Dionetta, "and shall you tell them to me?"

"Every woman in the world has secrets, and every woman in the world must have someone to whom she can whisper them. You will find that out for yourself in time. Yes, child, I have secrets—one, a very precious one. If ever you guess it without my telling you, keep it buried in your heart, and do not speak of it to a living soul."

"I would not dare, my lady."

They walked a little apart from the others during this dialogue. The concluding words brought them to the steps of the House of White Shadows.

"Edward," said the Advocate's wife to him, as they entered the house, "I have found a treasure. My new maid is charming."

"I am pleased to hear it. She has an ingenuous face, but you will be able to judge better when you know more of her."

"You do not trust many persons, Edward."

"Not many, Adelaide."

"Me?" she asked archly.

"Implicitly."

"And another, I think."

"Certainly, one other."

"I should not be far out if I were to name Christian Almer."

"It is to him I refer."

"I have sometimes wondered," she said, with an artless look, "why you should be so partial to him. He is so unlike you."

"We are frequently drawn to our unlikes; but Almer and I have one quality in common with each other."

"What quality, Edward?"

"The quality of the dog—faithfulness. Almer's friend-

ship is precious to me, and mine to him, because we are each to the other faithful."

"The quality of the dog! How odd that sounds! Though when one thinks of it there is really something noble in it. And friendship—it is almost as if you placed it higher than love."

"It is far higher. Love too frequently changes, as the seasons change. Friendship is, of the two, the more likely to endure, being less liable to storms. But even a faithful friendship is rare."

"And faithful love much rarer, according to your ideas. Yet, Mr. Almer, having this quality of the dog, would be certain, you believe, to be faithful both in love and friendship."

"To the death."

"You are thorough in your opinions, Edward."

"I do not believe in half-heartedness, Adelaide."

The arrangements within the house were complete and admirable. For the Advocate's wife, a boudoir and reception-rooms into which new fashions had been introduced with judgment so good as not to jar with the old furnishings which had adorned them for many generations. For the Advocate a study, with a library which won from him cordial approval; a spacious and commodious apartment, neither overloaded with furniture nor oppressive with bare spaces; with an outlook from one window to the snow regions of Mont Blanc, from another to the city of Geneva, which was now bathed in a soft, mellow light. This tender evidence of departing day was creeping slowly downwards into the valleys from mount and city, a moving picture of infinite beauty.

They visited the study last; Adelaide had been loud in her praises of the house and its arrangement, commending this and that, and declaring that everything was perfect. While she was examining the furniture in the study the Advocate turned to the principal writing-table, upon which lay a pile of newspapers. He took up the first of these, and instinctively searched for the subject which had not left his mind since his visit to the banker, Jacob Hartrich—the murder of Madeline the flower-girl. He was deep in the perusal of fresh details, confirmatory of

Gautran's guilt, when he was aroused by a stifled cry of alarm from Adelaide. With the newspaper still in his hand, he looked up and asked what had alarmed her. She laughed nervously, and pointed to an old sideboard upon which a number of hideous faces were carved. To some of the faces bodies were attached, and the whole of this ancient work of art was extravagant enough to have had for its inspiration the imaginings of a madman's brain.

"I thought I saw them moving," said Adelaide.

The Advocate smiled, and said:

"It is the play of light over the figures that created the delusion; they are harmless, Adelaide."

The glow of sunset shone through a painted window upon the faces, which to a nervous mind might have seemed to be animated with living colour.

"Look at that frightful head," said Adelaide; "it is really stained with blood."

"And now," observed the Advocate, "the blood-stain fades away, and in the darker light the expression grows sad and solemn."

"I should be frightened of this room at night," said Adelaide, with a slight shiver; "I should fancy those hideous beings were only waiting an opportunity to steal out upon me for an evil purpose."

A noise in the passage outside diverted their attention.

"Gently, Fritz, gently," cried a voice, "unless you wish to make holes in the sound part of me."

The Advocate moved to the door, and opened it. A strange sight came into view.

CHAPTER VII

A VISIT FROM PIERRE LAMONT—DREAMS OF LOVE

AT the door stood Fritz the Fool, carrying in his arms what in the gathering dusk looked like a bundle. This bundle was human—a man who was but half a man. Embracing Fritz, with one arm tightly clutching the Fool's neck, the figure commenced to speak the moment the door was opened,

"I only am to blame; learning that you were in the study, I insisted upon being brought here immediately; carry me in gently, Fool, and set me in that chair."

The chair indicated was close to the writing-table, by which the Advocate was standing.

"Fritz made me acquainted with your arrival," continued the intruder, "and I hastened here without delay. When I tell you that I live two miles off, eight hundred feet above the level of this valley, you will realise the jolting I have had in my wheeled chair. Fritz, you can leave us; but be within call, as you must help to get me home again. Is there any need for me to introduce myself?" he asked.

"Master Lamont," said the Advocate.

"As much as is left of me; but I manage to exist. I have proved that a man can live without legs. You received my letter?"

"Yes; and I thank you for your attention. My wife," said the Advocate, introducing Adelaide. Attracted by the dulcet voice of Pierre Lamont, she had come out of the deeper shadows of the room. Dionetta had spoken truly; this thin, shrivelled wreck of mortality had a voice as sweet as honey.

"I cannot rise to pay my respects to you," said Pierre Lamont, his lynx eyes resting with profound admiration upon the beautiful woman, "but I beg you to believe that I am your devoted slave." Adelaide bent her head gracefully, and smiled upon the old lawyer. "One of my great anxieties is to know whether I have arranged the villa to your satisfaction. Christian Almer was most desirous that the place should be made pleasant and attractive, and I have endeavoured to carry out his instructions."

"We owe you a debt of gratitude," said Adelaide; "everything has been charmingly done."

"I am repaid for my labour," said Pierre Lamont gallantly. "You must be fatigued after your journey. Do not let me detain you. I shall remain with the Advocate but a very few minutes, and I trust you will allow me to make another and a longer visit."

"We shall always be happy to see you," said Adelaide, as she bowed and left the room,

"You are fortunate, comrade," said Pierre Lamont, "both in love and war. Your lady is the most beautiful I have ever beheld. I am selfishly in hopes that you will make a long stay with us; it will put some life into this sleepy valley. Is Christian Almer with you?"

"No; but I may induce him to come. It is to you," said the Advocate, pointing to the pile of newspapers, "that I am indebted for these."

"I thought you would find something in them to interest you. I see you have one of the papers in your hand, and that you were reading it before I intruded upon you. May I look at it? Ah! you have caught up the scent. It was the murder of the flower-girl I meant."

"Have you formed an opinion upon the case?"

"Scarcely yet; it is so surrounded with mystery. In my enforced retirement I amuse myself by taking up any important criminal case that occurs; and trying it in my solitude, acting at once the parts of judge and counsel for the prosecution and defence. A poor substitute for the reality; but I make it serve—not to my satisfaction, I confess, although I may show ingenuity in some of my conclusions. But I miss the cream, which lies in the personality of the persons concerned. This case of Gautran interests and perplexes me; were I able to take an active part, it is not unlikely I should move in it. I envy you, brother; I should feel proud if I could break a lance with you; but we do not live in an age of miracles, so I must be content, perforce, with my hermit life. What I read does not always please me; points are missed—almost wilfully missed, as it seems to me—strong links allowed to fall, disused, false inferences drawn, and, in the end, a verdict and sentence which half make me believe that justice limps on crutches. 'Fools, fools, fools!' I cry; 'if I were among you this should not be.' But what can an old cripple do? Grumble? Yes; and extract a morsel of satisfaction from his discontent—which tickles his vanity. That men's deserts are not meted out to them troubles me more now than it used to do. The times are too lenient of folly and crime. I would have the old law revived. 'To the doer as he hath done'—thus saith the thrice ancient word—so runs the 'Agamemnon.' If my

neighbour kill my ass, I would knock his on the head. And this Gautran, if he be guilty, deserves the death; if he be innocent, deserves to live and be set free. But to allow a poor wretch to be judged by public passions—Heaven send us a beneficent change!”

The voice of the speaker was so sweet, and the arguments so palatable to the Advocate, and so much in accordance with his own views, that he listened with pleasure to this outburst. He recognised in the cripple huddled up in the chair one whose pre-eminence in his craft had been worthily attained.

“I am pleased we have met,” he said, and the eyes of Pierre Lamont glistened.

He soon brought his visit to a close, and while Fritz the Fool was being summoned, he said that in the morning he would send the Advocate all the papers he could gather which might help to throw a light on the case of Gautran.

“You have spoken with Fritz, he tells me.”

“I have; he appears to me worth studying.”

“There is salt in the knave; he has occasionally managed to overreach me. Fool as he is, he has a head with brains in it. Farewell.”

Now, although the old lawyer, while he was with the Advocate, seemed to think of nothing but his more celebrated legal brother, it was far different as he was carried in his wheeled chair to his home on the heights. He had his own servant to propel him; Fritz walked by his side.

“You were right, Fritz, you were right,” said Pierre Lamont, and he smacked his lips, and his eyes kindled with the fire of youth, “she is a rare piece of flesh and blood—as fair as a lily, as ripe as a peach ready to drop from the wall. With passions of her own, Fritz; her veins are warm. To live in the heart of such a woman would be to live a perpetual summer. What say you, Fritz?”

“Nothing.”

“That is a fool’s answer.”

“Then the fools are the real wise men, for there is wisdom in silence. But I say nothing because I am thinking.”

"A mouse in labour. Beware of bringing forth a mountain; it will rend you to pieces."

Fritz softly hummed a tune as they climbed the hills. Only once did he speak till they arrived at Pierre Lamont's house; it was in reply to the old-lawyer, who said:

"It is easier going up the hills than coming down."

"That depends," said Fritz, "upon whether it is the mule or the man on his back."

Pierre Lamont laughed quietly; he had a full enjoyment of Fritz's humour.

"I have been thinking," said Fritz when the journey was completed——

"Ah, ah!" interrupted Pierre Lamont; "now for the mountain."

"—Upon the reason that made so fair a lady—young, and warm, and ripe—marry an icicle."

"There is hidden fire, Fritz; you may get it from a stone."

"I forgot," said Fritz, with a sly chuckle, "that I was speaking to an old man."

"Rogue!" cried Pierre Lamont, raising his stick.

"Never stretch out your hand," said Fritz, darting away, "for what you cannot reach."

"Fritz, Fritz, come here!"

"You will not strike?"

"No."

"I will trust you. There are lawyers I would not, though every word they uttered was framed in gold."

"So, you have been thinking of the reason that made so fair a lady marry an icicle?"

"Yes."

"The icicle is celebrated."

"That is of no account."

"He is rich."

"That is good."

"He is much older than she. He may die, and leave her a young widow."

"That is better."

"Then she may marry again—a younger man."

"That is best. Master Lamont, you have a head."

"And your own love-affair, Fritz, is that flourishing, eh? Have the pretty red lips kissed a 'Yes' yet?"

"The pretty red lips have not been asked. I bide my time. My peach is not as ripe as the icicle's. I'll go and look after it, Master Lamont. It needs careful watching; there are poachers about."

Fritz departed to look after his peach, and Pierre Lamont was carried into his study, where he sat until late in the night, surrounded by books and papers.

The Advocate was also in his study until two hours past midnight, searching newspaper after newspaper for particulars and details of the murder of the unfortunate girl whose body had been found in the wildly rushing Rhone. And while he pondered and mused, and oftentimes paced the room with thoughtful face, his wife lay sleeping in her holiday home, with smiles on her lips, and joy in her heart, for she was dreaming of one far away. And her dream was of love.

And Dionetta, the pretty maid, also slept, with her hands clasped at the back of her head; and her lady was saying to her: "Really and truly, Dionetta, you have not a lover? Women are made for love. It is the only thing in life worth living for." And a blush, even in her sleep, stole over her fair face and bosom. For her dream was of love.

And Pierre Lamont lived over again the days of his youth, and smirked and languished, and made fine speeches, and moved amidst a paradise of fair faces, all of which bore the likeness of one whom he had but just seen for the first time. And, old as he was, his dream was of love.

And Fritz the Fool tossed in his bed, and muttered:

"Too fair! too fair! If I were rich she might tempt me to be false to one, and make me vow I would lay down my life for her. It is a good thing for me that I am a fool."

And Gautran in his prison cell writhed upon his hard bed in the midst of the darkness; for by his side lay the phantom of the murdered girl, and his despair was deep and awful.

And in the mountains, two hundred miles distant from the House of White Shadows, roamed Christian Almer in the moonlight, struggling with all his mental might with a terror which possessed him. The spot he had flown to was ten thousand feet above the level of the sea, and his sleeping-room was in the hut of a peasant, mountain-born and mountain-reared, who lived a life of dull contentment with his goats, and wife, and children. Far away in the heights immense forests of fir-trees were grouped in dark, solemn masses. Not a branch stirred; a profound repose reigned within their depths, while the sleepless waterfalls in the lower heights, leaping, and creeping, and dashing over chasm and precipice, proclaimed the eternal wakefulness of Nature. The solitary man gazed upon these majestic signs in awe and despair.

"There is no such thing as oblivion," he muttered; "there is no such thing as forgetfulness. These solitudes, upon which no living creature but myself is to be seen, are full of accusing voices. My God! to die and be blotted out for ever and ever were better than this agony! I strive and strive, and cannot rid myself of the sin. I will conquer it—I will—I will—I will!"

But even as he spoke there gleamed upon him from a laughing cascade the vision of a face so beautiful as to force a groan from his lips. He turned from the vision, and it shone upon him with a tender wooing in every waterfall that met his sight. Trembling with the force of a passion he found it impossible to resist, he walked to his mountain home, and threw himself upon his couch. He was exhausted with sleepless nights, and in a short time he fell into a deep slumber. And a calm stole over his troubled soul, for his dreams were of love!

CHAPTER VIII

THE INTERVIEW IN THE PRISON

“**A**RISE, Gautran.”

At this command Gautran rose slowly from the floor of his prison-cell, upon which he had been lying at full length, and shaking himself like a dog, stood before the gaoler.

“Can’t you let me alone?” he asked, in a coarse, savage voice.

“Scum of the gutter!” replied the gaoler. “Speak civilly while you have the power, and be thankful your tongue is not dragged out by the roots.”

“You would do it if you dared.”

“Ay—and a thousand honest men would rejoice to help me.”

“Is it to tell me this you disturbed me?”

“No, murderer!”

“What do you want of me?”

The gaoler laughed at him in mockery. “You look more like beast than man.”

“That’s how I’ve been treated,” growled Gautran.

“Better than you deserve. So, you have influential friends, it seems.”

“Have I?” with a venomous flash at the taunt.

“One will be here to see you directly.”

“Let him keep from me. I care to see no one.”

“That may be, but the choice is not yours. This gentleman is not to be denied.”

“A gentleman, eh?” exclaimed Gautran, with some slight show of interest.

“Yes, a gentleman.”

“Who is he, and what is his business with me?”

“He is a great lawyer, who has sent murderers to their doom——”

“Ah!” and Gautran drew a long vindictive breath through closed teeth.

“And has set some free, I’ve heard.”

“Is he going to do that for me?” asked Gautran, and a light of fierce hope shone in his eyes.

"He will earn Heaven's curse if he does, and man's as well. Here he is. Silence."

The door was opened, and the Advocate entered the cell.

"This is Gautran?" he asked of the gaoler.

"This is he," replied the gaoler.

"Leave me alone with him."

"It is against my orders, sir."

"Here is your authority."

He handed to the gaoler a paper, which gave him permission to hold free and uninterrupted converse with Gautran, accused of the murder of Madeline the flower-girl. The interview not to last longer than an hour.

The gaoler prepared to depart, but before he left the cell he said in an undertone:

"Be careful of the man; he is a savage, and not to be trusted."

"There is nothing to fear," said the Advocate.

The gaoler lingered a moment, and then retired.

The cell was but dimly lighted, and the Advocate, coming into it from the full sunlight of a bright day, could not see clearly for a little while. On the other hand, Gautran, whose eyes were accustomed to the gloom, had a distinct view of the Advocate, and in a furtive, hang-dog fashion he closely inspected the features of his visitor. The man who stood before him could obtain his condemnation or his acquittal. Dull-witted as he was, this conviction was as much an intuition as an impression gained from the gaoler's remarks.

"You are a woodman?" said the Advocate.

"Aye, a woodman. It is well known."

"Have you parents?"

"They are dead."

"Any brothers or sisters?"

"None. I was the only one."

"Friends?"

"No."

"Have you wife or children?"

"Neither."

"How much money have you?"

"Not a sou."

"What about this murder?" asked the Advocate abruptly.

"What about it, then?" demanded Gautran. The questions asked by the Advocate were more judicial than friendly, and he assumed an air of defiance.

"Speak in a different tone. I am here to assist you, if I see my way. You have no lawyer to defend you?"

"How should I get one? What lawyer works without pay, and where should I find the money to pay him?"

"Heed what I say. I do not ask you if you are innocent or guilty of the crime of which you stand charged, for that is a formula and, guilty or not guilty, you would return but one answer. Have you anything to tell me?"

"I can't think of anything."

"You have led an evil life."

"Not my fault. Can a man choose his own parents and his country? The life I have led I was born into; and that is to stand against me."

"Are there any witnesses who would come forward and speak in your favour?"

"None that I know of."

"Is it true that you were walking with the girl on the night she was murdered?"

"No man has heard me deny it," said Gautran, shuddering.

"Why do you shudder?"

"Master, you asked me just now whether I had a wife, and I told you I had none. This girl was to have been my wife. I loved her, and we were to have been married."

"That is disputed."

"Everything is disputed that would tell in my favour. The truth is of no use to a poor devil caught in a trap as I am. Have you heard any good of me, master?"

"Not any; all that I have heard is against you."

"That is the way of it. Well, then, judge for yourself."

"Can you indicate anyone who would be likely to murder the girl? You shudder again."

"I cannot help it. Master, put yourself in this cell, as

I am put, without light, without hope, without money, without a friend. You would need a strong nerve to stand it. You want to know if I can point out anyone who could have done the deed but me? Well, if I were free, and came face to face with him, I might. Not that I could say anything, or swear to anything for certain, for I did not see it done. No, master, I will not lie to you. Where would be the use? You are clever enough to find me out. But I had good reason to suspect, aye, to know, that the girl had other lovers, who pressed her hard, I dare say; some who were rich, while I was poor; some who were almost mad for her. She was followed by a dozen and more. She told me so herself, and used to laugh about it; but she never mentioned a name to me. You know something of women, master; they like the men to follow them—the best of them do—ladies as well as peasants. They were sent into the world to drive us to perdition. I was jealous of her, yes, I was jealous. Am I guilty because of that? How could I help being jealous when I loved her? It is in a man's blood. Well, then, what more can I say?"

In his intent observance of Gautran's manner the Advocate seemed to weigh every word that fell from the man's lips.

"At what time did you leave the girl on the last night you saw her alive?"

"At ten o'clock."

"She was alone at that hour?"

"Yes."

"Did you see her again after that?"

"No."

"Did you have reason to suspect that she was to meet any other man on that night?"

"If I had thought it, I should have stopped with her."

"For what purpose?"

"To see the man she had appointed to meet."

"And having seen him?"

"He would have had to answer to me. I am hot-blooded, master, and can stand up for my rights."

"Would you have harmed the girl?"

"No, unless she had driven me out of my senses."

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"Were you in that state on the night of her death?"

"No—I knew what I was about."

"You were heard to quarrel with her."

"I don't deny it."

"You were heard to say you would kill her."

"True enough. I told her if ever I found out that she was false to me, I would kill her."

"Had she bound herself to marry you?"

"She had sworn to marry me."

"The handkerchief round her neck, when her body was discovered in the river, is proved to have been yours."

"It was mine; I gave it to her. I had not much to give."

"When you were arrested you were searched?"

"Yes."

"Was anything taken from you?"

"My knife."

"Had you and the girl's secret lover—supposing she had one—met on that night, you might have used your knife."

"That is speaking beforehand. I can't say what might have happened."

"Come here into the light. Let me look at your hands."

"What trick are you going to play me, master?" asked Gautran, in a suspicious tone.

"No trick," replied the Advocate sternly. "Obey me, or I leave you."

Gautran debated with himself in silence for a full minute; then, with an impatient movement, as though it could not matter one way or another, he moved into the light, and held out his hands.

The Advocate, taking a powerful glass from his pocket, examined the prisoner's fingers and nails and wrists with the utmost minuteness, Gautran, the while, wrapped in wonder at the strange proceeding.

"Now," said the Advocate, "hold your head back, so that the light may shine on your face."

Gautran obeyed, warily holding himself in readiness to spring upon the Advocate in case of an attack. By the aid of his glass the Advocate examined Gautran's face

and neck with as much care as he had bestowed upon the hands, and then said :

“ That will do.”

“ What is it all for, master ? ” asked Gautran.

“ I am here to ask questions, not to answer them. Since your arrest, have you been examined as I have examined you ? ”

“ No, master.”

“ Has any examination whatever been made of you by doctors or gaolers or lawyers ? ”

“ None at all.”

“ How long had you known the girl ? ”

“ Ever since she came into the neighbourhood.”

“ Were you not acquainted with her before ? ”

“ No.”

“ From what part of the country did she come ? ”

“ I can't say.”

“ Not knowing ? ”

“ Not knowing.”

“ But being intimate with her, you could scarcely avoid asking her the question.”

“ I did ask her, and I was curious to find out. She would not satisfy me ; and when I pressed her, she said the other one—Pauline—had made her promise not to tell.”

“ You don't know, then, where she was born ? ”

“ No.”

“ Her refusal to tell you—was it lightly or seriously uttered ? ”

“ Seriously.”

“ As though there was a secret in her life she wished to conceal ? ”

“ I never thought of it in that way, but I can see now it must have been so.”

“ Something discreditable, then ? ”

“ Most likely. Master, you go deeper than I do.”

“ What relationship existed between Pauline and Made-line ? ”

“ Some said they were sisters, but there was a big difference in their ages. Others said that Pauline was her mother, but I don't believe it, for they never spoke together

in that way. Master, I don't know what to say about it; it used to puzzle me; but it was no business of mine."

"Did you never hear Pauline address Madeline as her child?"

"Never."

"They addressed each other by their Christian names?"

"Yes."

"Did they resemble each other in feature?"

"There was something of a likeness between them."

"Why did Pauline leave the girl?"

"No one knew."

"That is all you can tell me?"

"That is all."

Then after a slight pause, the Advocate asked:

"Do you value your liberty?"

"Yes, master," replied Gautran excitedly.

"Let no person know what has passed between us, and do not repeat one word I have said to you."

"I understand; you may depend upon me. But master, will you not tell me something more? Am I to be set free or not?"

"You are to be tried; what is brought against you at your trial will establish either your innocence or your guilt."

He knocked at the door of the prison cell, and the gaoler opened it for him and let him out.

"Well, Gautran?" said the gaoler, but Gautran, wrapped in contemplation of the door through which the Advocate had taken his departure, paid no attention to him. "Do you hear me?" cried the gaoler, shaking his prisoner with no gentle hand.

"What now?"

"Is the great lawyer going to defend you?"

"You want to know too much," said Gautran, and refused to speak another word on the subject.

During the whole of the day there were but two figures in his mind—those of the Advocate and the murdered girl. The latter presented itself in various accusing aspects, and he vainly strove to rid himself of the spectre. Its hair hung in wild disorder over neck and bosom, its

white lips moved, its mournful eyes struck terror to his soul. The figure of the Advocate presented itself in far different aspects; it was always terrible, Satanic, and damning in its suggestions.

"What matter," muttered Gautran, "if he gets me off? I can do as I please then."

In the evening, when the small window in his cell was dark, the gaoler heard him crying out loudly. He entered, and demanded what ailed the wretch.

"Light—light!" implored Gautran; "give me light!"

"Beast in human shape," said the gaoler; "you have light enough. You'll get no more. Stop your howling, or I'll stop it for you!"

"Light! light! light!" moaned Gautran, clasping his hands over his eyes. But he could not shut out the phantom of the murdered girl, which from that moment never left him. So he lay and writhed during the night, and would have dashed his head against the wall to put an end to his misery had he not been afraid of death.

CHAPTER IX

THE ADVOCATE UNDERTAKES A STRANGE TASK.

IT was on the evening of this day, the third since the arrival of the Advocate in Geneva, that he said to his wife over the dinner-table:

"I shall in all likelihood be up the whole of to-night in my study. Do not let me be disturbed."

"Who should disturb you?" asked Adelaide languidly. "There are only you and I in the villa; of course I would not venture to intrude upon you without permission."

"You misunderstand me, Adelaide; it is because we are in a strange house that I thought it best to tell you."

"As if there were anything unusual in your shutting yourself up all night in your study! Our notions of the way to lead an agreeable life are so different! Take your own course, Edward; you are older and wiser than I; but you must not wonder that I think it strange. You come to the country for rest, and you are as hard at work as ever."

"I cannot live without work; aimless days would send me to my grave. If you are lonely, Adelaide——"

"Oh, no, I am not," she cried vivaciously, "at least, not yet. There is so much in the neighbourhood that is interesting. Dionetta and I have been out all day seeing the sights. On the road to Master Lamont's house there is the loveliest rustic bridge. And the wild flowers are the most beautiful I have ever seen. We met a priest, Father Capel, a gentle-looking man, with the kindest face! He said he intended to call upon you, and hoped to be permitted. I said, of course, you would be charmed. I had a good mind to visit Master Lamont, but his house was too far up the hills. Fool Fritz joined us; he is very amusing, with his efforts to be wise. I was delighted everywhere with the people. I went into some of their cottages, and the women were very respectful; and the children—upon my word, Edward, they stare at me as if I were a picture."

The Advocate looked up at this, and regarded his wife with fond admiration. In his private life two influences were dominant—love for his wife, and friendship for Christian Almer. He had love for no other woman, and friendship for no other man, and his trust in both was a perfect trust.

"I do not wonder that the children stare at you," he said; "you must be a new and pleasant experience to them."

"I believe they take me for a saint," she said, laughing gaily; "and I need not tell *you* that I am very far from being one."

"You are, as we all are, human; and very beautiful, Adelaide."

She gazed at him in surprise.

"It is not often you pay me compliments."

"Do you need them from me? To be sure of my affection—is not that sufficient?"

"But I am fond of compliments."

"I must commence a new study, then," he said gravely; it was difficult for him to indulge in light themes for many minutes together. "So you are making yourself acquainted with the neighbours. I hope you will not soon tire of them."

"When I do I must seek out some other amusement. You have also discovered something since you came here in which you appear to be wonderfully interested."

"Yes; a criminal case——"

"A criminal case!" she echoed pettishly.

"In which there is a great mystery. I do not trouble you with these law matters; long ago you expressed weariness of such themes."

Her humour changed again.

"A mystery!" she exclaimed with child-like vivacity, "in a place where news is so scarce! It must be delightful. What is it about? There is a woman in it, of course. There always is."

"Yes; a young woman, whose body was found in the Rhone."

"Murdered?"

"Murdered, as it at present seems."

"The wretch! Have they caught him? For of course it is a man who committed the dreadful deed."

"One is in prison, charged with the crime. I visited him to-day."

"Surely you are not going to defend him?"

"It is probable. I shall decide to-night."

"But why, Edward, why? If the man is guilty, should he not be punished?"

"Undoubtedly he should. And if he is innocent, he should not be made to suffer. He is poor and friendless; it will be a relief for me to take up the case, should I believe him to be unjustly accused."

"Is he young—handsome—and was it done through jealousy?"

"I have told you the case is shrouded in mystery. As for the man charged with the crime, he is very common and repulsive-looking."

"And you intend to defend such a creature?"

"Most likely."

She shrugged her shoulders with a slight gesture of contempt. She had no understanding of his motives, no sympathy in his labours, no pride in his victories."

When he retired to his study he did not immediately proceed to the investigation of the case of Gautran, as it

was set forth in the numerous papers which lay on the table. These papers, in accordance with the given promise, had been sent to him by Pierre Lamont, and it was his intention to employ the hours of the night in a careful study of the details of the affair, and of the conjectures and opinions of editors and correspondents.

But he held his purpose back for a while, and for nearly half-an-hour paced the floor slowly in deep thought. Suddenly he went out, and sought his wife's private room.

"It did not occur to me before," he said, "to tell you that a friend of Christian Almer's—Mr. Hartrich, the banker—in a conversation I had with him, expressed his belief that Almer was suffering."

"Ill!" she cried in an agitated tone.

"In mind, not in body. You have received letters from him lately, I believe?"

"Yes, three or four—the last a fortnight ago."

"Does he say he is unwell?"

"No; but now I think of it, he does not write in his usual good spirits."

"You have his address?"

"Yes; he is in Switzerland, you know."

"So Mr. Hartrich informed me—somewhere in the mountains, endeavouring to extract peace of mind from silence and solitude. That is well enough for a few days, and intellectual men are always grateful for such a change; but, if it is prolonged, there is danger of its bringing a mental disease of a serious and enduring nature upon a man brooding upon unhealthy fancies. I value Almer too highly to lose sight of him, or to allow him to drift. He has no family ties, and is in a certain sense a lonely man. Why should he not come and remain with us during our stay in the village? I had an idea that he himself would have proposed doing so."

"He might have considered it indelicate," said Adelaide with a bright colour in her face, "the house being his. As if he had a right to be here."

"It is by no means likely," said the Advocate, shaking his head, "that Almer would ever be swayed by other than generous and large-minded considerations. Write to him to-night, and ask him to leave his solitude, and make

his home with us. He will be company for you, and your bright and cheerful ways will do him good. The prospect of his visit has already excited you, I see. I am afraid," he said, with a regretful pathos in his voice, "that my society affords you but poor enjoyment; yet I never thought otherwise, when you honoured me by accepting my proposal of marriage, than that you loved me."

"I hope you do not think otherwise now," she said in a low tone.

"Why, no," he said with a sigh of relief; "what reason have I to think otherwise? We had time to study each other's characters, and I did not present myself in a false light. But we are forgetting Almer. Can you divine any cause for unusual melancholy in him?"

She seemed to consider, and answered:

"No, she could not imagine why he should be melancholy."

"Mr. Hartrich," continued the Advocate, "suggested that he might have experienced a disappointment in love, but I could not entertain the suggestion. Almer and I have for years exchanged confidences in which much of men's inner natures is revealed, and had he met with such a disappointment, he would have confided in me. I may be mistaken, however; your opinion would be valuable here; in these delicate matters, women are keen observers."

"Mr. Hartrich's suggestion is absurd; I am convinced Mr. Almer has not met with a disappointment in love. He is so bright and attractive——"

"That any woman," said the Advocate, taking up the thread, for Adelaide seemed somewhat at a loss for words, "might be proud to win him. That is your thought, Adelaide."

"Yes."

"I agree with you. I have never in my life known a man more likely to inspire love in a woman's heart than Christian Almer, and I have sometimes wondered that he had not met with one to whom he was drawn; it would be a powerful influence over him for good. Of an impure passion I believe him incapable. Write to him to-night, and urge him to come to us."

"If you wrote to him, also, it would be as well."

"I will do so; you can enclose my letter in yours. How does your new maid suit you?"

"Admirably. She is perfection."

"Which does not exist."

"If I could induce her grandmother to part with her, I should like to keep her with me always."

"Do not tempt her, Adelaide. For a simple maid a country life is the happiest and best—indeed, for any maid, or any man, young or old."

"How seldom practice and precept agree! Why do you not adopt a country life?"

"Too late. A man must follow his star. I should die of inaction in the country; and you—I smile when I think what would become of you were I to condemn you to it."

"You are not always right. I adore the country!"

"For an hour and a day. Adelaide, you could not exist out of society."

Until the Alpine peaks were tipped with the fire of the rising sun, the Advocate remained in his study, investigating and considering the case of Gautran. Only once did he leave it to give his wife the letter he wrote to Christian Almer. Newspaper after newspaper was read and laid aside, until the long labour came to its end. Then the Advocate rose, with no trace of fatigue on his countenance, and according to his wont, walked slowly up and down in deep thought. His eyes rested occasionally upon the grotesque and hideous figures carved on the old sideboard, which, had they been sentient and endowed with the power of speech, might have warned him that he had already, within the past few hours, woven one tragic link in his life, and have held him back from weaving another. But he saw no warning in their fantastic faces, and before he retired to rest he had formed his resolve. On the following day all Geneva was startled by the news that the celebrated Advocate, who had travelled thither for rest from years of arduous toil, had undertaken the defence of a wretch upon whose soul, in the opinion of nearly every thinking man and woman, the guilt of blood lay heavily. The trial of Gautran was

instantly invested with an importance which elevated it into an absorbing theme with every class of society.

CHAPTER X

TWO LETTERS—FROM FRIEND TO FRIEND, FROM LOVER
TO LOVER

I

“**M**Y DEAR ALMER,—We have been here three days, and are comfortably established in your singularly-named villa, the House of White Shadows. It is a perfect country residence, and the scenery around it is, I am told, charming. As you are aware, I have no eyes for the beauties of Nature; human nature and human motive alone interest me, and my impressions of the neighbourhood are derived from the descriptions of my wife, who enjoys novelty with the impulsive enjoyment of a child. It appears that she was enchanted when she heard from your lips that your house was supposed to be haunted by shadows, and although you cautioned her immediately afterwards, she was not to be deterred from accepting your invitation. Up to this time, no ghost has appeared to her, nor has my composure been disturbed by supernatural visions. I am a non-believer in visions from the spiritual world; she is only too ready to believe. It is the human interest attached to such fancies—for which, of course, there must be some foundation—which fascinates and arrests the general attention. There, for me, the interest ends; I do not travel beyond reality.

“I am supposed to have come for rest and repose. The physicians who laid this burden upon me know little of my nature; idleness is more irksome, and I believe more injurious, to me than the severest labour; and it is a relief, therefore, to me to find myself interested in a startling criminal case which is shortly coming on for trial in Geneva. It is a case of murder, and a man is in prison, charged with its commission. He has no friends, he has

no means, he is a vicious creature of the commonest and lowest type. There is nothing in him to recommend him to favour; he is a being to be avoided—but these are not the points to be considered. Is the man guilty or not guilty? He is pronounced guilty by universal public opinion, and the jury which will be empannelled to try him will be ready to convict upon the slightest evidence, or, indeed, without evidence. The trial will be a mockery of justice unless the accused is defended by one who is not influenced by passion and prejudice. There is a feature in the case which has taken powerful possession of me, and which, as far as I can judge, has not occurred to others. I intend to devote the whole of to-night to a study of the details of the crime, and it is likely that I shall undertake the defence of this repulsive creature—no doubt much to his astonishment. I have, with this object in view, already had an interview with him in his prison-cell, and the trouble I had to obtain permission to see him is a sufficient indication of the popular temper. When, therefore, you hear—if in the mountain fastness in which you are intrenched, you have the opportunity of hearing any news at all from the world at your feet—that I have undertaken the defence of a man named Gautran, accused of the murder of a flower-girl named Madeline, do not be surprised.

“What is most troubling me at the present moment is—what is my wife to do, how is she to occupy her time, during our stay in the House of White Shadows? At present she is full of animation and delight; the new faces and scenery by which she is surrounded are very attractive to her; but the novelty will wear off and then she will grow dull. Save me from self-reproach and uneasiness by taking up your residence with us, if not for the whole of the time we remain here, which I should much prefer, at least for a few weeks. By so doing you will confer a service upon us all. My wife enjoys your society; you know the feeling I entertain for you; and personal association with sincere friends will be of real benefit to you. I urge it earnestly upon you, for I have an impression that you are brooding over unhealthy fancies, and that you have sought solitude for the purpose

of battling with one of those ordinary maladies of the mind to which sensitive natures are prone. If it be so, Christian, you are committing a grave error; the battle is unequal; silence and seclusion will not help you to a victory over yourself. Come and unbosom yourself to me, if you have anything to unbosom, and do not fear that I shall intrude either myself or my advice upon you against your inclination. If you have a grief, meet it in the society of those who love you. There is a medicine in a friendly smile, in a friendly word, which you cannot find in solitude. One needs sometimes, not the sunshine of fair weather, but the sunshine of the soul. Here it awaits you, and should you bring dark vapours with you I promise you they will soon be dispelled. I am disposed—out of purest friendliness—to insist upon your coming, and to be so uncharitable as to accept it as an act of weakness if you refuse me. When the case of Gautran is at an end I shall be an idle man; you, and only you, can avert the injurious effect idleness will have upon me. We will find occupation together, and create reminiscences for future pleasant thought. It may be a long time, if ever, before another opportunity so favourable occurs for passing a few weeks in each other's society, undisturbed by professional cares and duties. You see I am taking a selfish view of the matter. Add an inestimable value to your hospitality by coming here at once and sweetening my leisure.

“Your friend,

“EDWARD.”

II

“MY OWN,—My husband is uneasy about you, and has imposed a task upon me. You shall judge for yourself whether it is a disagreeable one. I am to write to you immediately, to insist upon your coming to us without an hour's delay. You have not the option of refusal. The Advocate insists upon it, and I also insist upon it. You *must* come. Upon the receipt of this letter you will pack up your portmanteau, and travel hither in the swiftest possible way, by the shortest possible route. Be sure that

you do not disobey me. You are to come instantly, without an hour's—nay, without a moment's delay. If you fail I will not answer for the consequences, and upon you will rest the responsibility of all that follows. For what reason, do you suppose, did I accept the offer of your villa in this strangely quiet valley, unless it was in the hope and the belief that we should be near each other? And now that I *am* here, pledged to remain, unable to leave without an exhibition of the most dreadful vacillation—which would not matter were I to have my own way, and were everything to be exactly as I wish it—you are bound to fly swiftly to the side of one who entertains for you the very sincerest affection. Do not be angry with me for my disregard of your caution to be careful in my manner of writing to you. I cannot help it. I think of you continually, and if you wish me not to write what you fear other eyes than ours might see, you must come and talk to me. I shall count the minutes till you are here. The Advocate is uneasy about you, and is, indeed and indeed, most anxious that you should be with us. He seems to have an idea that you have some cause for melancholy, and that you are brooding over it. Could anything be more absurd? Cause for melancholy! Just as if you were alone in the world! You do not need to be told that there is one being who will care for you till she is an old, old woman. Think of me as I shall be then. An old woman, with white hair, walking with a crutch-stick, as they do on the stage. If you *are* sad, it is a just punishment upon you. There was nothing in the world to prevent your travelling with us. What do you think a friend of yours, a banker in Geneva, suggested to the Advocate? He said that it was probable that you had experienced a disappointment in love. Now, this sets me thinking. Why have you chosen to hide yourself in the mountains, a hundred and a hundred miles away? Have you been there before? Is there some pretty girl to attract you, from whom you find it impossible to tear yourself? If it is so, let her beware of me. You have no idea of what I should be capable if you gave me cause for jealousy. What is her disposition—pensive or gay? She is younger than I am, I suppose—though I am not so old, sir!—with

hands—— Ah, I am easier in my mind; her hands must be coarse, for she is a peasant. I am almost reconciled; you could never fall in love with a peasant. They may be pretty and fresh for a month or two, but they cannot help being coarse, and I know how anything coarse grates upon you. But a peasant-girl might fall in love with you—there are more unlikely things than that. Shall I tell you what the Advocate said of you this evening? It will make you vain, but never mind. ‘I have never in my life known a man more likely to inspire love in a woman’s heart than Christian Almer.’ There, sir, his very words. How true they are! Ah, how cruel was the chance that separated us from each other, and brought us together again when I was another man’s wife! Oh, if I had only known! If some kind fairy had told me that the man who, when I was a child, enthralled me with his beautiful fancies, and won my heart, and who then, as it seemed, passed out of my life—if I had suspected that, after many years, he would return home from his wanderings with the resolve to seek out the child and make her his wife, do you for one moment suppose I would not have waited for him? Do you think it possible I could ever have accepted the hand of another man? No, it could not have been, for even as a child I used to dream of you, and held you in my heart above all other human beings. But you were gone—I never thought of seeing you again—and I was so young that I could have had no foreshadowing of what was to come.

“Have you ever considered how utterly different my life might have been had you not crossed it? Not that I reproach you—do not think that; but how strangely things turn out, without the principal actor having anything to do with them! It is exactly like sitting down quietly by yourself, and seeing all sorts of wonderful things happen in which you have no hand, though if you were not in existence they could never have occurred. Just think for a moment. If it had not happened that you knew me when I was a child, and was fond of me then, as you have told me I don’t know how many times—if it had not happened that your restless spirit drove you abroad where you remained for years and years and years—if it had not

happened that, tired of leading a wandering life, you resolved to come home and seek out the child you used to pet and make love to (but she did not know the meaning of love then)—if it had not happened that, entirely ignorant of what was passing in your mind, the child, grown into a pretty woman (I think I may say that, without vanity), was persuaded by her friends that to refuse an offer of marriage made to her by a great lawyer, famous and rich, was something too shocking to contemplate—if it had not happened that she, knowing nothing of her own heart, knowing nothing of the world, allowed herself to be guided by these cold calculating friends to accept a man utterly unsuited to her, and with whom she has never had an hour's real happiness—if it had not happened by the strangest chance, that this man and you were friends—— There, my dear, follow it out for yourself, and reflect how different our lives might have been if everything had happened in the way it ought to have done. I was cheated and tricked into a marriage with a man whose heart has room for only one sentiment—ambition. I am bound to him for life, but I am yours till death—although the bond which unites us is, as you have taught me, but a spiritual bond.

“Are you angry with me for putting all this on paper? You must not be, for I cannot help it if I am not wise. Wisdom belongs to men. Come, then, and give me wise counsel, and prevent me from committing indiscretions. For I declare to you, upon my heart and honour, if you do not very soon present yourself at the House of White Shadows, I will steal from it in the night and make my way to the mountains to see what wonderful attraction it is that separates us. What food for scandal! What wagging and shaking of heads! How the women's tongues would run! I can imagine it all. Save me from exposure as you are a true man.

“You have made the villa beautiful. As I walk about the house and grounds I am filled with delight to think that you have effected such a magic change for my sake. Master Lamont has shown really exquisite taste. What a singular old man he is. I can't decide whether I like him or not. But how strange that you should have had

it all done by deputy, and that you have not set foot in the house since you were a child. You see I know a great deal. Who tells me? My new maid Dionetta. Do you remember, in one of the letters you showed me from your steward, that he spoke about the old housekeeper, Mother Denise, and a pretty granddaughter? I made up my mind at the time that the pretty granddaughter should be my maid. And she is, and her name is Dionetta. Is it not pretty?—but not prettier than the owner. Will that tempt you? I have sent my town maid away, much to her displeasure; she spoke to the Advocate in complaint, but he did not mention it to me; I found it out for myself. He is as close as the grave. So I am here absolutely alone, with none but strangers around me.

“I am very much interested in the pictures in the studio of the old *châlet*, especially in a pair which represents, the first, two lovers with the sun shining on them; the second, the lovers parted by a cold grey sea. They stand on opposite shores, gazing despairingly at each other. He must have been a weak-minded man indeed; he should have taken a boat, and rowed across to her; and if he was afraid to do that, she should have gone to him. That would have been the most sensible thing.

“I could continue my gossip till daylight breaks, but I have already lost an hour of my beauty sleep, and I want you, upon your arrival, to see me at my best.

“My heart goes with this letter; bring it swiftly back to me.”

“Yours for ever,
“ADELAIDE.”

CHAPTER XI

FIRE AND SNOW—FOOL FRITZ INFORMS PIERRE LAMONT
WHERE ACTUAL LOVE COMMENCES

“NEWS, Master Lamont, news!”

“Of what nature, Fritz?”

“Of a diabolical nature. Satan is busy.”

“He is never idle—for which the priests, if they have any gratitude in them, should be thankful.”

“You are not fond of the priests, Master Lamont.”

“I do not hate them.”

“Still you are not fond of them.”

“I do not love them. Your news, fool—concerning whom?”

“A greater than you, or you do not speak the truth.”

“The Advocate, then?”

“The same. You are a good guesser.”

“Fritz, your news is stale.”

“I am unlucky; I thought to be the first. You have heard the news?”

“Not I.”

“You have read a letter, informing you of it.”

“You are a bad guesser. I have neither received nor read a letter to-day.”

“You have heard nothing, you have read nothing; and yet you know.”

“As surely as you stand before me. Fritz, you are not a scholar, but I will give you a sum any fool can do. Add one to one—what do you make of it?”

“Why, that is easy enough, Master Lamont.”

“The answer then, fool?”

“One.”

“Good. You shall smart for it, in the most vulnerable part of man. You receive from me, every week, one franc. I owe you, for last week, one franc; I owe you, for this, one.”

“That is so.”

“Last week, one; this week, one. I discharge the liability.” And Pierre Lamont handed a franc to Fritz.

Fritz weighed the coin in the palm of his hand, spun it in the air and smiled.

"Master Lamont, here is a fair challenge. If I prove to you that one and one are one, this franc you have given me shall not count off what you owe me."

"I agree."

"When one man and one woman are joined in matrimony, they become one flesh. Therefore, one and one are one."

"You have earned the franc, fool. Here are the two I owe you."

"Now, perhaps, you will tell *me* what I came here to tell *you*."

"The Advocate intends to defend Gautran, who stands charged with the murder of the flower-girl."

"You are a master worth serving. I have half a mind to give you back your franc."

"Make it a whole mind, Fritz."

"No; second thoughts are best. My pockets are not as warm as yours. They are not so well lined. How did you guess, Master Lamont?"

"By means of a golden rule, an infallible rule, by the Rule of One—which, intelligibly interpreted to shallow minds—no offence, Fritz, I hope——"

"Don't mind me, Master Lamont; I am a fool and used to hard knocks."

"Then by the Rule of One, which means the rule of human nature—as, for example, that makes the drunkard stagger to the wine-shop and the sluggard to his bed—I guessed that the Advocate could not withstand so tempting a chance to prove the truth of the scriptural words that all men are liars. What will be palatable information to me is the manner in which the news has been received."

"Heaven keep me from ever being so received! The Advocate has not added to the number of his friends. People are gazing at each other in amazement, and asking for reasons which none are able to give."

"And his wife, Fritz, his wife?"

"Takes as much interest in his doings as a bee does in the crawling of a snail."

"Rogue, you have cheated me! How about one and one being one?"

"There are marriages and marriages. This was not made in Heaven; when it came about there was a confusion in the pairing, and another couple are as badly off. There will be a natural end to both."

"How brought about, fool?"

"By your own rule, the rule of human nature."

"When a jumper jumps, he first measures his distance with his eye. Do they quarrel?"

"No."

"Does she look coldly upon him, or he upon her?"

"No."

"Is there silence between them?"

"No."

"You are a bad jumper, Fritz. You have not measured your distance."

"See, Master Lamont, I will prove it to you by a figure of speech. There travels from the south a flame of fire. There travels from the north a lump of snow. They meet. What happens? Either that the snow extinguishes the fire and it dies, or that the fire puts an end to the snow."

"Fairly illustrated, Fritz. Fire and snow! Truly a most unfortunate conjunction."

"She was in the mood to visit you yesterday had you lived a mile nearer the valley."

"You were out together."

"She and Dionetta were walking, and I met them and accompanied them. She spoke graciously to the villagers, and went into the cottages, and drank more than one cup of milk. She was sweeter than sugar, Master Lamont, and won the hearts of some of the women and of all the men. As for the children, they would have followed her to the world's end, I do believe, out of pure admiration. They carry now in their little heads the vision of the beautiful lady. Even Father Capel was struck by her beauty."

"Priests are mortals, Fritz. On which side did you walk—next to my lady or Dionetta?"

"I should be wrecked in a tempest. I sail only in quiet lakes."

"And the maid—did she object to your walking close to her?—for you are other than I take you to be if you did not walk close."

"Why should she object? Am I not a man? Women rather like fools."

"How stands the pretty maid with her new mistress?"

"In high favour, if one can judge from fingers."

"Fritz, your wit resembles a tide that is for ever flowing. Favour me with your parable."

"It is a delicate point to decide where actual love commences. Have you ever considered it, Master Lamont?"

"Not deeply, fool. In my young days I was a mad-brain; you are a philosopher. Like a bee, I took what fell in my way, and did not puzzle myself or the flower with questions. Where love commences? In the heart."

"No."

"In the brain."

"No."

"In the eye."

"No."

"Where, then?"

"In the finger-tips. Dionetta and I, walking side by side, shoulder to shoulder, our arms hanging down, brought into close contact our finger-tips. What wonder that they touched!"

"Natural magnetism, Fritz."

"With our finger-tips touching, we walked along, and if her heart palpitated as mine did, she must have experienced an inward commotion. Master Lamont, this is a confession for your ears only. I should be base and ungrateful to hide it from you."

"Your confidence shall be respected."

"It leads to an answer to your question as to how Dionetta stands with her new mistress. First the finger-tips, then the fingers, and her little hand was clasped in mine. It was then I felt the ring upon her finger."

"Ah!"

"Now, Dionetta never till yesterday owned a ring. I felt it, as a man who is curious would do, and suddenly her hand was snatched from mine. A moment or two afterwards, her hand was in mine again, but the ring was gone. A fine piece of conjuring. A man is no match for a woman in these small ways. To-day I saw her for about as long as I could count three. 'Who gave you the

ring?' I asked. 'My lady,' she answered. 'Don't tell grandmother that I have got a ring.' Therefore, Master Lamont, Dionetta stands well with her mistress."

"Logically carried out, Fritz. The saints prosper your wooing."

CHAPTER XII

THE STRUGGLE OF LOVE AND DUTY

IN his lonely room in the mountain hut in which he had taken up his quarters, Christian Almer sat writing. It was early morning; he had risen before the sun. During the past week he had struggled earnestly with the terror which oppressed him; his suffering had been great, but he believed he was conquering. The task he had imposed upon himself of setting his duty before him in clear terms afforded him consolation. The book in which he was writing contained the record of a love which had filled him with unrest, and threatened to bring dishonour into his life.

* * * * *

"I thank Heaven," he wrote, "that I am calmer than I have been for several days. Separation has proved an inestimable blessing. The day may come when I shall look upon my love as dead, and shall be able to think of it as one thinks of a beloved being whom death has snatched away.

"Even now, as I think of her, there is no fever in the thought. I have not betrayed my friend.

"How would he regard me if he were acquainted with my mad passion—if he knew that the woman he adored looked upon him with aversion, and gave her love to the friend whom he trusted as a brother?

"There was the error. To listen to her confession of love, and to make confession of my own.

"That a man should so forget himself—should be so completely the slave of his passions!

"How came it about? When were the first words spoken?

"She sat by my side, radiant and beautiful. Admir-

ing glances from every part of the theatre were cast upon her. In a corner of the box sat her husband, silent and thoughtful, heedless of the brilliant scene before him, heedless of her, as it seemed, heedless of the music and the singers.

"Royalty was there, immediately facing us, and princes levelled their opera-glasses at her.

"There are moments of intoxication when reason and conscience desert us.

"We were stepping into the carriage when a note was delivered to him. He read it, and said, 'I cannot go with you; I am called away. You will not miss me, as I do not dance. I will join you in a couple of hours.'

"So we went alone, we two together, and her hand rested lightly upon mine. And in the dance the words were spoken—words never to be recalled.

"What demon prompted them? Why did not an angel whisper to me, 'Remember. There is a to-morrow.'

"But in the present the morrow is forgotten. A false sense of security shuts out all thoughts of the consequences of our actions. A selfish delight enthrals us, and we do not see the figure of Retribution hovering above us.

"It is only when we are alone with our conscience that this figure is visible. Then it is that we tremble; then it is that we hear words which appal us.

"Again and again has this occurred to me, and I have vowed to myself that I would tear myself from her—a vow as worthless as the gambler's resolve to play no more. Drawn irresistibly forward, and finding in every meeting a shameful justification in the delusion that I was seeing her for the last time; and leaving her with a promise to come again soon. Incredible infatuation! But to listen to the recital of her sorrows and unhappiness without sympathising with her—it was not possible; and to hear her whisper, 'I love you, and only you,' without being thrilled by the confession—a man would need to be made of stone.

"How often has she said to me, when speaking of her husband, 'He has no heart!'

"Can I then, ever with any semblance of honesty that I

have not betrayed my friend? Basely have I betrayed him.

"If I were sure that she would not suffer—if I were sure that she would forget me! Coldness, neglect, indifference—they are sharp weapons, but I deserve to bleed.

"Still, I cry out against my fate. I have committed no crime. Love came to me and tortured me. But a man must perform a man's duty. I will strive to perform mine. Then in years to come I may be able to think of the past without shame, even with pride at having conquered.

"I have destroyed her portrait. I could not look upon her face and forget her."

* * * * *

A voice from an adjoining room caused him to lay aside his pen. It was the peasant, the master of the hut, calling to him, and asking if he was ready. He went out to the man.

"I heard you stirring," said the peasant, "and my young ones are waiting to show you where the edelweiss can be found."

The children, a boy and a girl, looked eagerly at Christian Almer. It had been arranged on the previous day that the three should go for a mountain excursion in search of the flower that brings good luck and good fortune to the finder. The children were sturdy-limbed and ruddy-faced, and were impatient to be off.

"Breakfast first," said Christian Almer, pinching the little girl's cheek.

Brown bread, honey, goat's milk, and an omelette were on the table, and the stranger, who had been as a god-send to the poor family, enjoyed the homely fare. The peasant had already calculated that if his lodger lived a year in the hut, they could save five hundred francs—a fortune. Christian Almer had been generous to the children, in whose eyes he was something more than mortal. Money is a magic power.

"Will the day be fine?" asked Christian.

"Yes," said the peasant; "but there will be a change in the evening. The little ones will know—you can trust to them."

Young as they were, they could read the signs on Nature's face, and could teach their gentleman friend wise things, great and rich as he was.

The father accompanied them for a couple of miles; he was a goat-herd, and, unlike others of his class, was by no means a silent man.

"You live a happy life here," said Christian Almer.

"Why, yes," said the peasant; "it is happy enough. We have to eat, but not to spare; there is the trouble. Still, God be thanked. The children are strong and healthy; that is another reason for thankfulness."

"Is your wife, as you are, mountain born?"

"Yes; and could tell you stories. And there," said the peasant, pointing upwards afar off, "as though it knew my wife were being talked of, there is the *lämmergeier*."

An enormous vulture, which seemed to have suddenly grown out of the air, was suspended in the clouds. So motionless was it that it might have been likened to a sculptured work, wrought by an angel's hand, and fixed in heaven as a sign. It could not have measured less than ten feet from wing to wing. Its colour was brown, with bright edges and white quills, and its fiery eyes were encircled by broad orange-shaded rings.

"My wife," said the peasant, "has reason to remember the *lämmergeier*. When she was three years old her father took her to a part of the mountains where they were hay-making, and not being able to work and attend to her at the same time, he set her down by the side of a hut. It was a fine sunny day, and Anna fell asleep. Her father, seeing her sleeping calmly, covered her face with a straw hat, and continued his work. Two hours afterwards he went to the spot, and Anna was gone. He searched for her everywhere, and all the haymakers assisted in the search, but Anna was nowhere to be found. My father and I—I was a mere lad at the time, five years older than Anna—were walking towards a mountain stream, three miles from where Anna had been sleeping, when I heard the cry of a child. It came from a precipice, and above this precipice a vulture was flying. We went in the direction of the cry, and found Anna lying on the edge of the precipice, clinging to the roots with her little

hand. She was slipping down, and would have slipped to certain death had we been three minutes later. It was a difficult task to rescue her as it was, but we managed it, and carried her to her father. She had no cap to her head, and no shoes or stockings on her feet; she had lost them in her flight through the air in the vulture's beak. She has a scar on her left arm to this day as a remembrance of her acquaintance with the *lämmergeier*. So it fell out afterwards, when she was a young woman, that I married her."

Ever and again, as they walked onwards, Christian Almer turned to look upon the vulture, which remained perfectly still, with its wings outstretched, until it was hid from his sight by the peculiar formation of the valleys they were traversing.

Hitherto their course had lain amidst masses of the most beautiful flowers; gentians with purple bells, others spotted and yellow, with brilliant whorls of bloom, the lilac-flowered *campanula*, the *anemone*, the blue *columbine* and *starwort*, the lovely *forget-me-not*—which Christian Almer mentally likened to bits of heaven dropped down—and the *Alpine rose*, the queen of *Alpine flowers*. Now all was changed. The track was bare of foliage; not a blade of grass peeped up from the barren rocks.

"There is good reason for it," said the peasant; "here, long years ago, a man killed his brother in cold blood. Since that day no flowers will grow upon the spot. There are nights on which the spirit of the murderer wanders mournfully about these rocks; a black dog accompanies him, whose bark you can sometimes hear. This valley is accursed."

Soon afterwards the peasant left Christian Almer to the guidance of the children, and with them the young man spent the day, sharing contentedly with them the black bread and hard sausage they had brought for dinner. This mid-day meal was eaten as they sat beside a lake, in the waters of which there was not a sign of life, and Christian Almer noticed that, as the children ate, they watched the bosom of this lake with a strange and singular interest.

"What are you gazing at?" he asked, curious to learn.

"For the dead white trout," answered the boy.
"Whenever a priest dies it floats upon the lake."

In the lower heights, where the fir-trees stretched their feathery tips to the clouds, they found the flower they were in search of, and the children were wild with delight. The sun was setting when they returned to the hut, tired and gratified with their day's wanderings. The peasant's wife smiled as she saw the edelweiss.

"A lucky love-flower," she said to Christian Almer.

These simple words proved to him how hard was the lesson of forgetfulness he was striving to learn; he was profoundly agitated by them.

Night fell, and the clouds grew black.

"The wind is rising," said the peasant; "an ill night for travellers. Here is one coming towards us."

It proved to be a guide who lived in the nearest post village, and who, duly commissioned for the service, brought to Christian Almer the letters of the Advocate and his wife.

"A storm is gathering," said the guide; "I must find shelter on the heights to-night."

In his lonely room Christian Almer broke the seals, and by the dull light of a single candle read the lines written by friend to friend, by lover to lover.

The thunder rolled over the mountains; the lightning flashed through the small window; the storm was upon him.

He read the letters once only, but every word was impressed clearly upon his brain. For an hour he sat in silence, gazing vacantly at the edelweiss on the table, the lucky love-flower.

The peasant's wife called to him, and asked if he wanted anything.

"Nothing," he replied, in a voice that sounded strange to him.

"I will leave the bread and milk on the table," she said.
"Good-night."

He did not answer her, nor did he respond to the children's good-night. Their voices, the children's especially, seemed to his ears to come from a great distance.

A drop of rain fell from the roof upon the candle, and

extinguished the light. For a long while he remained in darkness, until all in the hut were sleeping; then he went out into the wild night, clutching the letters tight in his hand.

He staggered almost blindly onwards, and in the course of half an hour found himself standing on a narrow and perilous bridge, from which the few travellers who passed that way could obtain a view of a torrent which dashed with sublime and terrific force over a precipice upon the rocks below, a thousand feet down.

"If I were to grow dizzy now!" he muttered, with a reckless laugh; and he tempted fate by leaning over the narrow bridge, and gazing downwards into the dark depths.

Indistinct shapes grew out of the mighty and eternal waterfall. Of hosts of angry men battling with each other; of rushing horses; of armies of vultures swooping down for prey; of accusing and beautiful faces; of smiling mouths and white teeth flashing; and, amidst the whirl, sounds of shrieks and laughter.

Suddenly he straightened himself, and tearing Adelaide's letter into a thousand pieces, flung the evidence of a treacherous love into the furious torrent of waters; and as he did so he thought that there were times in a man's life when death were the best blessing which Heaven could bestow upon him!

CHAPTER XIII

THE TRIAL OF GAUTRAN

THE trial of Gautran was proceeding, and the court was thronged with an excited gathering of men and women, upon whom not a word in the story of the tragic drama was thrown away. Impressed by the great powers of the Advocate who had undertaken to appear for the accused, the most effective measures had been adopted to prove Gautran's guilt, and obtain a conviction.

It was a legal battle, fought with all the subtle weapons at the disposal of the law.

Gautran's prosecutors fought with faces unmasked,

and with their hands displayed ; the Advocate, on the contrary, was pursuing a course which none could fathom ; nor did he give a clue to it. Long before the case was closed the jury were ready to deliver their verdict ; but, calm and unmoved, the Advocate, with amazing patience, followed out his secret theory, the revelation of which was awaited, by those who knew him best and feared him most, with intense and painful curiosity.

Every disreputable circumstance in Gautran's life was raked up to display the odiousness of his character ; his infamous career was tracked from his childhood to the hour of his arrest. A creature more debased, with features more hideous, it would have been difficult to drag forward from the worst haunts of crime and shame. Degraded he was born, degraded he had lived, degraded he stood before his judges. It was a horror to gaze upon his face as he stood in the dock, convulsively clutching the rails.

For eight days had he so stood, execrated and condemned by all. For eight days he had endured the anguish of a thousand deaths, of a myriad agonising fears. His soul had been harrowed by the most awful visions—visions of which none but himself had any conception. In his cell with the gaolers watching his every movement ; in the court with the glare of daylight upon him ; in the dusky corridors he traversed morning and evening he saw the phantom of the girl with whose murder he was charged, and by her side the phantom of himself standing on the threshold of a future in which there was no mercy or pity.

No communication passed between him and the lawyer who was fighting for him ; not once did the Advocate turn to the prisoner or address a word to him ; it was as though he were battling for a victory in which Gautran was in no wise concerned. But if indeed he desired to win, he adopted the strangest tactics to accomplish his desire. Not a question he asked the witnesses, not an observation he made to the judge, but tended to fix more surely the prisoner's degradation, and gradually there stole into Gautran's heart a deadly hatred and animosity against his defender.

"He defends me to ruin me," this was Gautran's thought; "he is seeking to destroy me, body and soul."

His own replies to the questions put to him by the judge were sufficient to convict him. He equivocated and lied in the most barefaced manner, and when he was exposed and reproved, evinced no shame—preserving either a dogged silence, or obstinately exclaiming that the whole world was leagued against him. Apart from the question whether he was lying or speaking the truth, there was a certain consistency in his method which would have been of service to him had his cause been good. This was especially noticeable when he was being interrogated with respect to his relations with the murdered girl.

"You insist," said the judge, "that Madeline accepted you as her lover?"

"Yes," replied Gautran, "I insist upon it."

"Evidence will be brought forward to prove that it was not so. What, then, will you answer?"

"That whoever denies it is a liar."

"And if a dozen or twenty deny it?"

"They lie, the lot of them."

"What should make them speak falsely instead of truly?"

"Because they are all against me."

"There is no other evidence except your bare statement that Madeline and you were affianced."

"That is my misfortune. If she were alive she could speak for me."

"It is a safe remark, the poor child being in her grave. It is the rule for young girls to love men whose appearance is not repulsive."

"Is this," cried Gautran, smiting his face with his fist, "to stand as a witness against me, too?"

"No; but a girl has generally a cause for falling in love. If the man be not attractive in appearance, it is almost certain he will possess some other quality to attract her. He may be clever, and this may win her."

"I do not pretend to be clever."

"His manners may be engaging. His nature may be kind and affectionate, and she may have had proof of it."

"My nature is kind and affectionate. It may have been

that, if you are determined upon having a reason for her fondness for me."

"She was fond of you?"

"Aye."

"Did she tell you so, and when?"

"Always when we were alone."

"We cannot have Madeline's evidence as to the feelings she entertained for you; but we can have the evidence of others who knew you both. Are you acquainted with Katherine Scherrer?"

"Not too well; we were never very intimate."

"She is a young woman a few years older than Madeline, and she warned Madeline against you. She herself had received instances of your brutality. Before you saw Madeline you made advances towards Katherine Scherrer."

"False. She made advances towards me. She asked me to be her lover, and now she speaks against me out of revenge."

"She has not spoken yet, but she will. Madeline told her that she trembled at the sight of you, and had entreated you not to follow her; but that you would not be shaken off."

"It is my way; I will never be baulked."

"It is true, therefore; you paid no attention to this poor girl's entreaties because it is your way not to allow yourself to be baulked."

"I did not mean that; I was thinking of other matters."

"Katherine Scherrer has a mother."

"Yes; a woman of no account."

"Some time ago this mother informed you, if you did not cease to pester Katherine with your insulting proposals, that she would have you beaten."

"I should like to see the man who would have attempted it."

"That is savagely spoken for one whose nature is kind and affectionate."

"May not a man defend himself? I don't say I am kind and affectionate to men; but I am to women."

"The murdered girl found you so. Hearing from her daughter that Madeline was frightened of you, and did

not wish you to follow her, Katherine's mother desired you to let the girl alone."

"She lies."

"They all lie who utter a word against you?"

"Every one of them."

"You never courted Katherine Scherrer?"

"Never."

"Her mother never spoke to you about either her daughter or Madeline?"

"Never."

"Do you know the Widow Joseph?"

"No."

"Madeline lodged in her house."

"What is that to me?"

"Did she never speak to you concerning Madeline?"

"Never."

"Attend. Four nights before Madeline met her death you were seen prowling outside Widow Joseph's house."

"I was not there."

"The Widow Joseph came out and asked you what you wanted."

"She did not."

"You said you must see Madeline. The Widow Joseph went into the house, and returned with the message that Madeline would not see you. Upon that you tried to force your way into the house, and struck the woman because she prevented you. Madeline came down, alarmed at the sounds of the struggle, and begged you to go away, and you said you would, now that you had seen her, as you had made up your mind to. What have you to say to this?"

"A batch of lies. Twenty women could not have prevented me getting into the house."

"You think yourself a match for twenty women?"

"Aye."

"And for as many men?"

"For one man, whoever he may be. Give me the chance of proving it."

"Do you know Heinrich Heitz?"

"No."

"He is, like yourself, a woodcutter."

"There are thousands of woodcutters."

"Did you and he not work together as partners?"

"We did not."

"Were you not continually quarrelling, and did he not wish to break the partnership?"

"No."

"In consequence of this, did you not threaten to murder him?"

"No."

"Did you not strike him with a weapon, and cut his forehead open?"

"No."

"How many women have you loved?"

"One."

"Her name?"

"Madeline."

"You never loved another?"

"Never."

"Have you been married?"

"No."

"Have you ever lived with a woman who should have been your wife?"

"Never."

"Did you not continually beat this poor woman until her life became a burden to her, and she was compelled to fly from you to another part of the country?"

"No."

"Do you expect to be believed in the answers you have given?"

"No."

"It is said that you possess great strength."

"It has served me in good stead."

"That you are a man of violent passions."

"I have my feelings. I would never submit to be trampled on."

"You were always kind to Madeline?"

"Always."

"On the night of her murder?"

"Yes."

"Witnesses will prove that you were heard to say, 'I will kill you! I will kill you!' Do you deny saying so?"

"No."

"How does that cruel threat accord with a mild and affectionate nature?"

"I was asking her whether she had another lover, and I said if she had, and encouraged him, that I would kill her."

"The handkerchief found round her neck was yours."

"I gave it to her as a love-gift."

"A terrible love-gift. It was not wound loosely round her neck; it was tight, almost to strangulation."

"She must have made it so in her struggles, or——"

"Or?"

"The man who killed her must have attempted to strangle her with it."

"That is your explanation?"

"Yes."

"Your face is bathed in perspiration; your eyes glare wildly."

"Change places with me, and see how you would feel."

"Such signs, then, are the signs of innocence?"

"What else should they be?"

During this long examination, Gautran's limbs trembled violently, and there passed over his face the most frightful expressions.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE EVIDENCE OF WITNESSES

AMONG the first witnesses called was Heinrich Heitz, a wood-cutter, who had been for some time in partnership with Gautran, and of whom Gautran had denied any knowledge whatever.

On his forehead was the red scar of a wound inflicted some time before.

"Look at the prisoner. Do you know him?"

"I have reason to."

"His name?"

"Gautran."

"How did he get his living?"

"By wood-cutting."

"You and he were comrades for a time?"

"We were."

"For how long?"

"For three years; we were partners."

"During the time you worked with him, did he know you as Heinrich Heitz?"

"By no other name. I never bore another."

"Was the partnership an agreeable one?"

"Not to me; it was infernally disagreeable. I never want another partner like him."

"Why?"

"Because I don't want another savage beast for a partner."

"You did not get along well with him?"

"Quite the reverse."

"For what reasons?"

"Well, for one, I am a hard-working man; he is an indolent bully. The master he works for once does not want to employ him again. When we worked together on a task, the profits of which were to be equally divided between us, he shirked his share of the work, and left me to do the lot."

"Did you endeavour to separate from him?"

"I did; and he swore he would murder me; and once, when I was more than usually determined, he marked me on my forehead. You can see the scar; I shall never get rid of it."

"Did he use a weapon against you?"

"Yes; a knife."

"His temper is ungovernable?"

"He has not the slightest control over it."

"He is a man of great strength?"

"He is very powerful."

"Possessed with an idea which he was determined to carry out, is it likely that anything would soften him?"

"Nothing could soften him."

"How would opposition affect him?"

"It would infuriate him. I have seen him, when crossed, behave as if he were a mad tiger instead of a human being."

"At such times, would it be likely that he would show any coolness or cunning?"

"He would have no time to think; he would be carried away by his passion."

"You were acquainted with him when he was a lad?"

"I was."

"Was he noted for his cruel disposition in his childhood?"

"He was; it was the common talk."

"Did he take a pleasure in inflicting physical pain upon those weaker than himself?"

"He did."

"And in prolonging that pain?"

"Yes."

"In his paroxysms of fury would not an appeal to his humanity have a softening effect upon him?"

"He has no humanity."

"You were acquainted with Madeline?"

"I was."

"Was she an amiable girl?"

"Most amiable."

"She was very gentle?"

"As gentle as a child."

"But she was capable of being aroused?"

"Of course she was."

"She had many admirers?"

"I have heard so."

"You yourself admired her?"

"I did."

"You made love to her?"

"I suppose I did."

"Did she encourage you?"

"I cannot say she did."

"Did you ever attempt to embrace her?"

The witness did not reply to this question, and upon its being repeated, still preserved silence. Admonished by the judge, and ordered to reply, he said:

"Yes, I have attempted to embrace her."

"On more than one occasion."

"Only on one occasion."

"Did she permit the embrace?"

"No."

"She resisted you?"

"Yes."

"There must have been a struggle. Did she strike you?"

"She scratched my face."

"She resisted you successfully?"

"Yes."

"Gentle as she was, she possessed strength?"

"Oh yes, more than one would have supposed."

"Strength which she would exert to protect herself from insult?"

"Yes."

"Her disposition was a happy one?"

"That was easy to see. She was always singing to herself, and smiling."

"You believe she was fond of life?"

"Why yes—who is not?"

"And would not have welcomed a violent and sudden death?"

"Certainly not. What a question!"

"Threatened with such a fate, she would have resisted?"

"Aye, with all her strength. It would be but natural."

"Knowing Madeline somewhat intimately, you must have known Pauline?"

"Yes, I knew her."

"It is unfortunate and inexplicable that we cannot call her as a witness, and are ignorant of the reason why she left Madeline alone. Can you furnish any clue, even the slightest, which might enable us to find her?"

"I cannot; I do not know where she has gone."

"Were they sisters, or mother and daughter?"

"I cannot say."

"Do you know where they came from?"

"I do not."

"Reflect. During your intimacy, was any chance word or remark made by either of the women which, followed up, might furnish the information?"

"I can remember none. But something was said, a few days before Pauline left, which surprised me."

“Relate it, and do not fear to weary the court. Omit nothing.”

“I made love to Madeline, as I have said, and she did not encourage me. Then, for perhaps a month or two, I said nothing more to her than good-morning or good-evening. But afterwards, when I was told that Gautran was following her up, I thought to myself, ‘I am better than he; why should I be discouraged because she said “No” to me once?’ Well, then it was that I mustered up courage to speak to Pauline, thinking to win her to my side. I did not, though. Pauline was angry and impatient with me, and as much as told me that when Madeline married it would be to a better man than I was. I was angry, also, because it seemed as if she looked down on me. ‘You think she will marry a gentleman,’ said I. ‘It might be so,’ she answered. ‘A fine idea that,’ said I, ‘for a peasant. But perhaps she isn’t a peasant: perhaps she is a lady in disguise.’ I suppose I spoke scornfully, for Pauline fired up, and asked whether Madeline was not good enough, and pretty enough, and gentle enough for a lady; and said, too, that those who believed her to be a peasant might one day find out their mistake. And then all at once she stopped suddenly, with red fire in her face, and I saw she had said that which she had rather left unspoken.”

This last piece of evidence supplied a new feature of interest in the case. It furnished a clue to a tempting mystery as to the social position of Pauline and Madeline; but it was a clue which could not be followed to a satisfactory result, although another unexpected revelation was made in the course of the trial which appeared to have some connection with it. Much of the evidence given by Heinrich Heitz was elicited by the Advocate—especially those particulars which related to Gautran’s strength and ferocity, and to Madeline’s love of life and the way in which she met an insult. It was not easy to see what good could be done for Gautran by the stress which the Advocate laid upon these points.

Katherine Scherrer was called and examined. She testified that Gautran had made advances towards her, and had pressed her to become his wife; that she refused him,

and that he threatened her; that as he persisted in following her, her mother had spoken to him, and had warned him, if he did not cease persecuting her daughter, that she would have him beaten. This evidence was corroborated by Katherine's mother, who testified that she had cautioned Gautran not to persecute Madeline with his attentions and proposals. Madeline had expressed to both these women her abhorrence of Gautran and her fear of him, but nothing could induce him to relinquish his pursuit of her. The only evidence elicited from these witnesses by the Advocate related to Gautran's strength and ferocity.

Following Katherine Scherrer and her mother came a witness whose appearance provoked murmurs of compassion. It was a poor, wretched woman, half demented, who had lived with Gautran in another part of the country, and who had been so brutally treated by him that her reason had become impaired. If her appearance provoked compassion, the story of her wrongs, as it was skilfully drawn from her by kindly examination, stirred the court into strong indignation, and threw a lurid light upon the character of the man arraigned at the bar of justice. In the presence of this poor creature the judge interrogated Gautran.

"You denied having ever lived with a woman who should have been your wife. Do you still deny it?"

"Yes."

"Shameless obstinacy! Look at this poor woman, whom your cruelty has reduced to a state of imbecility. Do you not know her?"

"I know nothing of her."

"You never lived with her?"

"Never."

"You will even go so far as to declare that you never saw her before to-day?"

"Yes; I never saw her before to-day."

"To question you farther would be useless. You have shown yourself in your true colours."

To which Gautran made answer: "I can't help my colours. They're not of my choosing."

The Widow Joseph was next called.

CHAPTER XV

THE WIDOW JOSEPH GIVES EVIDENCE RESPECTING A MYSTERIOUS VISITOR

THE appearance of this woman was looked forward to by the spectators with lively curiosity, and her evidence was listened to with deep attention.

"Your name is Joseph?"

"That was my husband's first name. While he lived I was known as Mistress Joseph; since his death I have been called the Widow Joseph."

"The poor child, Madeline, and her companion, Pauline, lived in your house?"

"Yes, from the first day they came into this part of the country. 'We have come a great distance,' said Pauline to me, 'and want a room to sleep in.' I showed her the room, and said it would be twelve francs a month. She paid me twelve francs, and remained with me till she left to go on a journey."

"Did you ask her where she came from?"

"Yes; and she answered that it was of no consequence."

"Did she pay the rent regularly?"

"Yes; and always without being asked for it."

"Did she tell you she was poor?"

"She said she had but little money."

"Did they have any settled plan of gaining a livelihood?"

"I do not think they had at first. Pauline asked me whether I thought it likely they could earn a living by selling flowers. I looked at Madeline, and said that I thought they were certain to do well."

"You looked at Madeline. Why?"

"She was a very pretty girl."

"And you thought, because she was very pretty, that she would have a greater chance of disposing of her flowers."

"Yes. Gentlemen like to buy of pretty girls."

"That is not said to Madeline's disparagement?"

"No. Madeline was a good girl. She was full of gaiety, but it was innocent gaiety."

"What were your impressions of them? As to their social position? Did you believe them to be humbly born?"

"Pauline certainly; she was a peasant the same as myself. But there was something superior about Madeline which puzzled me."

"How? In what way?"

"It was only an impression. Yet there were signs. Pauline's hands were hard and coarse; and from remarks she made from time to time I knew that she was peasant-born. Madeline's hands were soft and delicate, and she had not been accustomed to toil, which all peasants are, from their infancy almost."

"From this do you infer that they were not related to each other?"

"I am sure they were related to each other. Perhaps few had the opportunities of judging as well as I could. When they were in a quiet mood I have seen expressions upon their faces so exactly alike as to leave no doubt that they were closely related."

"Sisters?"

"I cannot say."

"Or mother and daughter?"

"I wish to tell everything I know, but to say nothing that might be turned into a reproach against them."

"We have every confidence in you. Judgment can be formed from the bearing of persons towards each other. Pauline loved Madeline?"

"Devotedly."

"There is a distinctive quality in the attachment of a loving mother for her child which can scarcely be mistaken; it is far different, in certain visible manifestations—especially on occasions where there is any slight disagreement—between sisters. Distinctive, also, is the tenderness which accompanies the exercise of a mother's authority. Bearing this in mind, and recalling to the best of your ability those particulars of their intercourse which came within your cognisance, which hypothesis would you be the more ready to believe—that they were sisters or mother and child?"

"That they were mother and child."

"We recognise your anxiety to assist us. Pauline's hands, you say, were coarse, while Madeline's were soft and delicate. Ordinarily, a peasant woman brings up her child as a peasant, with no false notions; in this instance, however, Pauline brought Madeline up with some idea that the young girl was superior to her own station in life. Else why the unusual care of the child? Supposing this line of argument to be correct, it appears not to be likely that the attentions of a man like Gautran would be encouraged."

"They were not encouraged."

"Do you know that they were not encouraged from statements made to you by Pauline and Madeline?"

"Yes."

"Then Gautran's declaration that he was Madeline's accepted lover is false?"

"Quite false."

"He speaks falsely when he says that Madeline promised to marry him?"

"It is impossible."

"Four nights before Madeline met her death, was Gautran outside your house?"

"Yes; he was prowling about there with his evil face, for a long time."

"Did you go to him, and ask him what he wanted?"

"Yes."

"Did he tell you that he must see Madeline?"

"Yes, and I went into the house, and informed the girl. She said she would not see him, and I went down to Gautran and told him so. He then tried to force himself into the house, and I stood in his way. He struck me, and Madeline, frightened by my cries, ran to the door, and begged him to go away."

"It is a fact that he was often seen in Madeline's company?"

"Yes; do what they would, they could not get rid of him; and they were frightened, if they angered him too much, that he would commit an act of violence."

"As he did?"

"As he did. It is written on Madeline's grave."

“Had the poor girl any other lovers?”

“None that I should call lovers. But she was greatly admired.”

“Was any one of these lovers especially favoured?”

“Not that I knew of.”

“Did any of them visit the house?”

“No—but may I speak?”

“Certainly.”

“It was not what I should call a visit. A gentleman came once to the door, and before I could get there, Pauline was with him. All that I heard was this: ‘It is useless,’ Pauline said to him; ‘I will not allow you to see her, and if you persecute us with your attentions I will appeal for help to those who will teach you a lesson.’ ‘What is your objection to me?’ he asked, and he was smiling all the time he spoke. ‘Am I not a gentleman?’ ‘Yes,’ she answered; ‘and it is because of that, that I will not permit you to address her. Gentlemen! I have had enough of gentlemen!’ ‘You are a foolish woman,’ he said, and he went away. That is all, and that is the only time—except when I saw Pauline in conversation with a man. He might have been a gentleman, but his clothes were not the clothes of one; neither were they the clothes of a peasant. They were conversing at a little distance from the house. I did not hear what they said, not a word, and half an hour afterwards Pauline came home. There was a look on her face such as I had never observed—a look of triumph and doubt. But she made no remark to me, nor I to her.”

“Where was Madeline at this time?”

“In the house.”

“Did you see this man again?”

“A second time, two evenings after. A third time, within the same week. He and Pauline spoke together very earnestly, and when anyone approached them always moved out of hearing. During the second week he came to the house, and inquired for Pauline. She ran downstairs and accompanied him into the open road. This occurred to my knowledge five or six times, until Pauline said to me, ‘To-morrow I am going on a journey. Before long I may be able to reward you well for the kindness

you have shown us.' The following day she left, and I have not seen her since."

"Did she say how long she would be likely to be away?"

"I understood not longer than three weeks."

"That time has passed, and still she does not appear. Since she left, have you seen the man who was so frequently with her?"

"No."

"He has not been to the house to make inquiries?"

"No."

"Is it not possible that he may have been Pauline's lover?"

"There was nothing of the lover in his manner towards her."

"There was, however, some secret between them?"

"Evidently."

"And Madeline—was she acquainted with it?"

"It is impossible to say."

"You have no reason to suppose, when Pauline went away, that she had no intention of returning?"

"I am positive she intended to return."

"And with good news, for she promised to reward you for your kindness?"

"Yes, she did so."

"Is it not probable that she, also, may have met with foul play?"

"It is probable; but Heaven alone knows!"

CHAPTER XVI

THE CONCLUSION OF THE PROSECUTION

AT length the case for the prosecution was concluded, with an expression of regret on the part of counsel at the absence of Pauline, who might have been able to supply additional evidence, if any were needed, of the guilt of the prisoner.

"Every effort has been made," said counsel, "to trace and produce this woman, but when she parted from the murdered girl no person knew whither she was directing

her steps; even the Widow Joseph, the one living person besides the mysterious male visitor who was in frequent consultation with her, can furnish us with no clue. The victim of this foul and horrible crime could most likely have told us, but her lips are sealed by the murderer's hand, the murderous wretch who stands before you.

"It has been suggested that Pauline has met with foul play. It may be so; otherwise, it is humanly impossible to divine the cause that could keep her from this trial.

"Neither have we been able to trace the man who was in her confidence, and between whom and herself a secret of a strange nature existed.

"In my own mind I do not doubt that this secret related to Madeline, but whether it did do so or not cannot affect the issue of this trial; neither can the absence of Pauline and her mysterious friend affect it. The proofs of the cruel, ruthless murder are complete and irrefragable, and nothing is wanting, not a link, in the chain of evidence to enable you to return a verdict which will deprive of the opportunity of committing further crime a wretch as infamous as ever walked the earth. He declares his innocence; if the value of that declaration is to be gauged by the tissue of falsehoods he has uttered, by his shameless effrontery and denials, by his revolting revelations of the degradation of his nature, he stands self-convicted.

"But it needs not that; had he not spoken, the issue would be the same; for painful and shocking as is the spectacle, you have but to glance at him to assure yourself of his guilt. If that is not sufficient to move you unhesitatingly to your duty, cast him from your thoughts and weigh only the evidence of truth which has been laid unfolded to you.

"As I speak, a picture of that terrible night, in the darkness of which the fearful deed was committed, rises before me.

"I see the river's bank in a mist of shadows; I see two forms moving onward, one a monster in human shape, the other that of a child who had never wronged a fellow creature, a child whose spirit was joyous and whose amiable disposition won every heart.

“It is not with her willing consent that this monster is in her company. He has followed her stealthily until he finds an opportunity to be alone with her, at a time when she is least likely to have friends near her, and in a place where she is entirely at his mercy. He forces his attentions upon her; she repulses him. She turns towards her home; he thrusts her roughly back. Enraged at her obstinacy, he threatens to kill her; his threats are heard by persons returning home along the river’s bank, and, until the sound of their footsteps has died away and they are out of hearing, he keeps his victim silent by force.

“Being alone with her once more, he renews his infamous suit. She still repulses him, and then commences a struggle which must have made the angels weep to witness.

“In vain his victim pleads, in vain she struggles; she clings to him and begs for her life in tones that might melt the stoniest heart; but this demon has no heart. He winds his handkerchief round her neck, he beats and tears her, as is proved by the bruises on her poor body. The frightful struggle ends, and the deed is accomplished which condemns the wretch to life-long torture in this world and to perdition in the next.

“Do not lose sight of this picture and of the evidence which establishes it; and let me warn you not to be diverted by sophistry or specious reasoning from the duty which you are here to perform.

“A most vile and horrible crime has been committed; the life of a child has been cruelly, remorselessly, wickedly sacrificed; her blood calls for justice on her murderer; and upon you rests the solemn responsibility of not permitting the escape of a wretch whose guilt has been proven by evidence so convincing as to leave no room for doubt in the mind of any human being who reasons in accordance with facts.

“I cannot refrain from impressing upon you the stern necessity of allowing no other considerations than those supplied by a calm judgment to guide you in the delivery of your verdict. I should be wanting in my duty if I did not warn you that there have been cases in which the guilty have unfortunately escaped by the raising of side

issues which had but the remotest bearing upon the crimes of which they stood accused. It is not by specious logic that a guilty man can be proved innocent. Innocence can only be established by facts, and the facts laid before you are fatal in the conclusion to be deduced from them. Bear these facts in mind, and do not allow your judgment to be clouded even by the highest triumphs of eloquence. I know of no greater reproach from which men of sensibility can suffer than that which proceeds from the consciousness that, in an unguarded moment, they have allowed themselves to be turned aside from the performance of a solemn duty. May you have no cause for such a reproach! May you have no cause to lament that you have allowed your judgment to be warped by a display of passionate and fevered oratory! Let a sense of justice alone be your guide. Justice we all desire, nothing more and nothing less. The law demands it of you; society demands it of you. The safety of your fellow citizens, the honour of young girls, of your sisters, your daughters, and others dear to you, depend upon your verdict. For if wretches like the prisoner are permitted to walk in our midst, to pursue their savage courses, to live their evil lives, unchecked, life and honour are in fatal peril. The duty you have to perform is a sacred duty—see that you perform it righteously and conscientiously, and bear in mind that the eyes of the Eternal are upon you.”

This appeal, delivered with intense earnestness, produced a profound impression. In the faces of the jury was written the fate of Gautran. They looked at each other with stern resolution. Under these circumstances, when the result of the trial appeared to be a foregone conclusion, it might have been expected, the climax of interest having apparently been reached, that the rising of the Advocate to speak for the defence would have attracted but slight attention. It was not so. At that moment the excitement reached a painful pitch, and every person in the court, with the exception of the jury and the judges, leant forward with eager and absorbed expectation.

CHAPTER XVII

THE ADVOCATE'S DEFENCE—THE VERDICT

HE spoke in a calm and passionless voice, the clear tones of which had an effect resembling that of a current of cold air through an over-heated atmosphere. The audience had been led to expect a display of fevered and passionate oratory; but neither in the Advocate's speech nor in his manner of delivering it was there any fire or passion; it was chiefly remarkable for earnestness and simplicity.

His first words were a panegyric of justice, the right of dispensing which had been placed in mortal hands by a Supreme Power which watched its dispensation with a jealous eye. He claimed for himself that the leading principle of his life, not only in his judicial, but in his private career, had been a desire for justice, in small matters as well as in great, for the lowliest equally with the loftiest of human beings. Before the bar of justice, prince and peasant, the most ignorant and the most highly cultured, the meanest and the most noble in form and feature, were equal. They had been told that justice was demanded from them by law and by society. He would supply a strange omission in this appeal, and he would tell them that, primarily and before every other consideration, the prisoner it was who demanded justice from them.

"That an innocent girl has been done to death," said the Advocate, "is most unfortunately true, and as true that a man who inspires horror is charged with her murder. You have been told that you have but to glance at him to assure yourself of his guilt. These are lamentable words to be used in an argument of accusation. The facts that the victim was of attractive, and that the accused is of repulsive appearance, should not weigh with you, even by a hair's weight, to the prejudice of the prisoner. If it does, I call upon you to remember that justice is blind to external impressions. And moreover, if in your minds you harbour a feeling such as exists outside this court

against the degraded creature who stands before you, I charge you to dismiss it.

“All the evidence presented to you which bears directly upon the crime is circumstantial. A murder has been committed—no person saw it committed. The last person proved to have been in the murdered girl's company, is Gautran, her lover, as he declares himself to have been.

“And here I would say that I do not expect you to place the slightest credence upon the statements of this man. His unblushing, astonishing falsehoods prove that in him the moral sense is deadened, if indeed it ever existed. But his own statement that, after the manner of his brutal nature, he loved the girl, may be accepted as probable. It has been sufficiently proved that the girl had other lovers, who were passionately enamoured of her. She was left to herself, deprived of the protection and counsel of a devoted woman, who, unhappily, was absent at the fatal crisis in her life. She was easily persuaded and easily led. Who can divine by what influences she was surrounded, by what temptations she was beset, temptations and influences which may have brought upon her an untimely death?

“Gautran was heard to say, ‘I will kill you—I will kill you!’ He had threatened her before, and she lived to speak of it to her companions, and to permit him, without break or interruption in their intimacy, to continue to associate with her. What more probable than that this was one of his usual threats in his moments of passion, when he jealously believed that a rival was endeavouring to supplant him in her affections?

“The handkerchief found about her neck belonged to Gautran. The gift of a handkerchief among the lower classes is not uncommon, and it is frequently worn round the neck. Easy, then, for any murderer to pull it tight during the commission of the crime. But apart from this, the handkerchief does not fix the crime of murder upon Gautran or any other accused, for you have had it proved that the girl did not die by strangulation, but by drowning. These are bare facts, and I present them to you in bare form, without needless comment. I do not

base my defence upon them, but upon what I am now about to say.

“ If in a case of circumstantial evidence there is reasonable cause to believe that the evidence furnished is of insufficient weight to convict; and if on the other side, on the side of the accused, evidence is adduced which directly proves, according to the best judgment we are enabled to form of human action in supreme moments—as to the course it would take and the manner in which it would be displayed—that it is almost beyond the bounds of possibility and nature that the person can have committed the deed, you have no option, unless you yourselves are bent upon judicial murder, than to acquit that person, however vile his character may be, however degraded his career and antecedents. It is evidence of this description which I intend to submit to you at the conclusion of my remarks.

“ The character of Gautran has been exposed and laid bare in all its vileness; the minuteness of the evidence is surprising; not the smallest detail has been overlooked or omitted to complete the picture of a ferocious, ignorant, and infamous being. Guilty, he deserves no mercy; innocent, he is not to be condemned because he is vile.

“ In the world's history there are records of countries and times in which it was the brutal fashion to bring four-footed animals to the bar of justice, there solemnly to try them for witchcraft and evil deeds; and you will find upon examination of those records of man's incredible folly and ignorance, that occasionally even these beasts of the earth—pigs and such-like—have been declared innocent of the crimes of which they have been charged. I ask no more for Gautran than the principle involved in these trials. Judge him, if you will, as you would an animal, but judge him in accordance with the principles of justice, which neither extenuates nor maliciously and unreasonably condemns.

“ The single accusation of the murder of Madeline, a flower-girl, is the point to be determined, and you must not travel beyond it to other crimes and other misdeeds of which Gautran may have been guilty.

“ It has been proved that the prisoner is possessed of

great strength, that he is violent in his actions, uncontrollable in his passions, and fond of inflicting pain and prolonging it. He has not a redeeming feature in his coarse, animal nature. Thwarted, he makes the person who thwarts him suffer without mercy. An appeal to his humanity would be useless—he has no humanity; when crossed, he has been seen to behave like a wild beast. All this is in evidence, and has been strongly dwelt upon as proof of guilt. Most important is this evidence, and I charge you not for one moment to lose sight of it.

“I come now to the depiction of the murdered girl, as it has been presented to you. Pretty, admired, gentle in her manners, and poor. Although the fact of a person being poor is no proof of morality, we may accept it in this instance as a proof of the girl's virtue. She was fond of life: her disposition was a happy one; she was in the habit of singing to herself.

“Thus we have the presentment of a young girl whose nature was joyous, and to whom life was sweet.

“Another important piece of evidence must be borne in mind. She possessed strength, greater strength than would have been supposed in a form so slight. This strength she would use to protect herself from injury: it has been proved that she used it successfully to protect herself from insult. In the whole of this case nothing has been more forcibly insisted upon than that she resisted her murder, and that there was a long and horrible struggle in which she received many injuries, wounds, bruises, and scratches, and in which her clothes were rent and torn.

“This struggle, in the natural order of things, could not have been a silent one; accompanying the conflict there must have been outcries, frenzied appeals for mercy, screams of terror and anguish. No witness has been called who heard such sounds, and therefore it must be a fact that the murder must have been committed some time after Gautran's threat, ‘I will kill you, I will kill you!’ was heard by persons who passed along the bank of the river in the darkness of that fatal night. Time enough for Gautran to have left her; time enough for another—lover or stranger—to meet her; time enough for

murder by another hand than that of the prisoner who stands charged with the commission of the crime.

“I assert, with all the force of my experience of human nature, that it is impossible that Gautran could have committed the deed. There was a long and terrible struggle—a struggle in which the murdered girl's clothes were torn, in which her face, her hands, her arms, her neck, her sides were bruised and wounded in a hundred cruel ways. Can you for one moment entertain the belief that, in this desperate fight in which two persons were engaged, only one should bear the marks of a contest so horrible? If you bring yourselves to this belief it must be by the aid of prejudice, not of reason. Attend to what follows.

“On the very morning after the murder, within four hours of the body being discovered in the river, Gautran was arrested. He wore the same clothes he had worn for months past, the only clothes he possessed. In these clothes there was not a rent or tear, nor any indication of a recent rent having been mended. How, then, could this man have been engaged in a violent and prolonged hand-to-hand conflict? It is manifestly impossible, opposed to all reasonable conjecture, that his garments could have escaped some injury, however slight, at the hands of a girl to whom life was very sweet, who was strong and capable of resistance, and who saw before her the shadow of an awful fate.

“Picture to yourselves this struggle already so vividly painted, so graphically portrayed. The unhappy girl clung to her destroyer, she clutched his dress, his hands, his body in her wild despair—a despair which inspired her with strength beyond her ordinary capacity. And of still greater weight is the fact that there was not to be found on any part of Gautran's body a scratch, a wound, or a bruise of any description.

“What, then, becomes of the evidence of a terrible life and death struggle in which it is said he was engaged? Upon this point alone the entire theory of the prosecution breaks down. The absence from Gautran's clothes and person of any mark or identification of a physical contest is the strongest testimony of his innocence of this

ruthless, diabolical crime; and, wretched and degraded as is the spectacle he presents, justice demands from you his acquittal.

“Still one other proof of his innocence remains to be spoken of; I will touch upon it lightly, but it bears a very strange aspect, as though the prosecution were fearful that its introduction would fatally injure their case.

“When Gautran was searched a knife was found upon him—the knife, without doubt, with which he inflicted upon the face of a comrade a wound which he will bear to the grave. Throughout the whole of the evidence for the prosecution I waited and looked for the production of that knife; I expected to see upon it a blood proof of guilt. But it was not produced; no mention has been made of it. Why? Because there is upon its blade no mark of blood.

“Do you believe that a ruffian like Gautran would have refrained from using his knife upon the body of his victim, to shorten the terrible struggle? Even in light quarrels men in his condition of life threaten freely with their knives, and use them recklessly. To suppose that with so swift and sure a means at hand to put an end to the horrible affair, Gautran, in the heat and fury of the time, refrained from availing himself of it, is to suppose a thing contrary and opposed to reason.

“Remember the answer given by one of the witnesses who knows the nature of the man well, when I asked him whether in his passionate moods Gautran would be likely to show coolness or cunning. ‘He would have no time to think; he would be carried away by his passion.’ His is the nature of a brute, governed by brute laws. You are here to try, not the prisoner’s general character, not his repulsive appearance, not his brutish nature, but a charge of murder of which he is accused, and of which, in the clear light of human motive and action, it is impossible he can be guilty.”

The Advocate’s speech, of which this is but a brief and imperfect summary, occupied seven hours, and was delivered throughout with a cold impressive earnestness and with an absence of passion which gradually and effectually turned the current which had set so fatally against the prisoner. The disgust and abhorrence he inspired were in

no wise modified, but the Advocate had instilled into the minds of his auditors the strongest doubts of Gautran's guilt.

Two witnesses were called, one a surgeon of eminence, the other a nurse in an hospital. They deposed that there were no marks of an encounter upon the prisoner's person, that upon his skin was no abrasion, that his clothes exhibited no traces of recent tear or repair, and that it was scarcely possible he could have been engaged in a violent personal struggle.

Upon the conclusion of this evidence, which cross-examination did not shake, the jury asked that Gautran should be examined by independent experts. This was done by thoroughly qualified men, whose evidence strengthened that of the witnesses for the defence. The jury asked, also, that the knife found upon Gautran should be produced. It was brought into court, and carefully examined, and it was found that its blade was entirely free from blood-stain.

The jury, astounded at the turn the affair had taken, listened attentively to the speech of the judge, who dwelt with great care upon every feature in the case. The court sat late to give its decision, and when the verdict was pronounced, Gautran was a free man.

Free, to enjoy the sunlight, and the seasons as they passed; free, to continue his life of crime and shame; free, to murder again!

BOOK II.—THE CONFESSION.

CHAPTER I

A LETTER FROM JOHN VANBRUGH

FOR a little while Gautran scarcely comprehended that he was at liberty to wander forth. He had so completely given himself up as lost that he was stupefied by the announcement that his liberty was restored to him. He gazed vacantly before him, and the announcement had to be twice repeated before he arrived at an understanding of its purport; then his attitude changed. A spasm of joy passed into his face, followed immediately by a spasm of fear; those who observed him would indeed have been amazed had they known what was passing through his mind.

“Free, am I?” he asked.

“You have been told so twice,” a warder answered.

“It astonishes you. Well, you are not the only one.”

As the warders fell from his side he watched them warily, fearing they were setting a trap which might prove his destruction.

From where he stood he could not see the Advocate, who was preparing to depart. Distasteful as the verdict was to every person in court, with the exception of Gautran and his counsel, those members of the legal profession who had not taken an active part in the trial were filled with professional admiration at the skill the Advocate had displayed. An eminent member of the bar remarked to him:

“It is a veritable triumph, the greatest and most surprising I have ever witnessed. None but yourself could have accomplished it. Yet I cannot believe in the man’s innocence.”

This lawyer held too high and honourable a position for the Advocate to remain silent.

"The man is innocent," he said.

"You know him to be so?"

"I know him to be so. I stake my reputation upon it."

"You almost convince me. It would be fatal to any reputation were Gautran, after what has passed, to be proved guilty. But that, of course, is impossible."

"Quite impossible," said the Advocate somewhat haughtily.

"Exactly so. There can be no room for doubt, after your statement that you know the man to be innocent."

With no wish to continue the conversation, the Advocate turned to leave the court when an officer presented himself.

"He wishes to speak to you, sir."

"He! Who?" asked the Advocate. He was impatient to be gone, his interest at the trial being at an end. The victory was gained; there was nothing more to be done.

"The prisoner, sir. He desired me to tell you."

"The prisoner!" said the Advocate. "You forget. The man is free."

He walked towards Gautran, and for the first time during the long days of the trial gazed directly in his client's face. The magnetism in the Advocate's eyes arrested Gautran's speech. His own dilated, and he appeared to forget what he had intended to say. They looked at each other in silence for a few moments, the expression on the face of the Advocate cold, keen, and searching, that on the face of Gautran as of a man entranced; and then the Advocate turned sternly away, without a word having been spoken between them. When Gautran looked again for his defender he was gone.

Gautran still lingered; the court was nearly empty.

"Be off," said the warder, who had been his chief attendant in his cell; "we have done with you for the present."

But Gautran made no effort to leave. The warder laid

his hand upon the ruffian's shoulder, with the intention of expelling him from the court.

Gautran shook him off with the snarl of a wild beast.

"Touch me again," he cried, "and I'll strangle you! I can do it easily enough—two of you at a time!"

And, indeed, so ferocious was his manner that it seemed as if he were disposed to carry his threat into execution.

"Women are more in your way," said the warder tauntingly. "Look you, Gautran; if Madeline had been my daughter, your life would not be worth an hour's purchase, despite the verdict gained by your clever Advocate."

"You would not dare to say that to me if you and I were alone," retorted Gautran, scowling at the sullen faces of the officers about him.

"Away with you!" exclaimed the warder, "at once, or we will throw you into the streets!"

"I will go when I get my property."

"What property?"

"The knife you took from me when you dragged me to prison. I don't move without it."

They deemed it best to comply with this demand, the right being on his side, and his knife was restored to him. It was an old knife, with a keen blade and a stout handle, and it opened and closed with a sharp click. Gautran tried it three or four times with savage satisfaction and then, with another interchange of threatening glances, he slunk from the court.

The Advocate's carriage was at the door, ready to convey him to Christian Almer's villa. But after his long confinement in the close court, he felt the need of physical exercise, and he dismissed his coachman, saying he intended to walk home. As the carriage drove off, a person plucked him by the sleeve, and pressed a letter into his hand. It was dusk, and the Advocate, although he looked quickly around, could not discover the giver. His sight was short and strong, and standing beneath the light of a street-lamp he opened and read the letter.

"OLD FRIEND,

"It will doubtless surprise you to see my handwriting, it is so long since we met. The sight of it may displease

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you, but that is of small consequence to me. When a man is in a desperate strait, he is occasionally driven to desperate courses. When needs must, as you are aware, the devil drives. I have been but an hour in Geneva, and I have heard of your victory; I congratulate you upon it. I must see you—soon. I know the House of White Shadows in the pretty valley yonder. At a short distance from the gates—but far enough off, and so situated as to enable a man to hide with safety if he desires—is a hill upon which I will wait for your signal to come to you, which shall be the waving of a white handkerchief from your study window. At midnight and alone will be best. You see how ready I am to oblige you. I shall wait till sunrise for the signal. If you are too busy to-night, let it be to-morrow night, or the next, or any night this week.

“I am, as ever, your friend,

“JOHN VANBRUGH.”

The Advocate placed the letter in his pocket, and murmured as he walked through the streets of Geneva:

“John Vanbrugh! Has he risen from his grave? He would see me at midnight and alone! He must be mad, or drunk, to make such a request. He may keep his vigil, undisturbed. Of such a friendship there can be no renewal. The gulf that separates us is too wide to be bridged over by sentimental memories. John Vanbrugh, the vagabond! I can imagine him, and the depth to which he has sunk. Every man must bear the consequences of his actions. Let him bear his, and make the best, or the worst, of them.”

CHAPTER II

A STARTLING INTERRUPTION

THE news of the acquittal of Gautran spread swiftly through the town, and the people gathered in front of the *cafés* and lingered in the streets, to gaze upon the celebrated Advocate who had worked the marvel.

“He has a face like the Sphynx,” said one.

"With just as much feeling," said another.

"Do you believe Gautran was innocent?"

"Not I—though he made it appear so."

"Neither do I believe it, but I confess I am puzzled."

"If Gautran did not murder the girl, who did?" asked one, a waverer, who formed an exception to the general rule.

"That is for the law to find out."

"It was found out, and the murderer has been set loose. We shall have to take care of ourselves on dark nights."

"Would you condemn a man upon insufficient evidence?"

"I would condemn such as Gautran on any evidence. When you want to get rid of vermin it does not do to be over particular."

"The law must be respected."

"Life must be protected. That is the first law."

"Hush! Here he is. Best not let him overhear you."

There was but little diversity of opinion. Even in the inn of The Seven Liars, to which Fritz the Fool—who had attended the court every day of the trial, and who had the fleetest foot of any man for a dozen miles round—had already conveyed the news of Gautran's acquittal, the discussion was loud and animated; the women regarding the result as an outrage on their sex, the men more disposed to put Gautran out of the question, and to throw upon the Advocate the opprobrium of the verdict.

"Did I not tell you," said Fritz, "that he could turn black into white? A great man—a great man! If we had more like him, murdering would be a fine trade."

There were, doubtless, among those who thronged the streets to see the Advocate pass, some sinners whose consciences tormented them, and who secretly hoped, if exposure ever overtook them, that Heaven would send them such a defender. His reception, indeed, partook of the character of an ovation. These tributes to his powers made no impression upon him; he pursued his way steadily onward, looking neither to the right nor to the left, and soon the gaily-lighted shops and *cafés* of Geneva were far behind him.

His thoughts were upon John Vanbrugh, who had been one of his boy friends, and whom for many years he had believed to be dead. In his lonely walk to the House of White Shadows he recalled the image of Vanbrugh, and dwelt, with idle curiosity, upon the recollection of their youthful lives. He had determined not to see Vanbrugh, and was resolved not to renew a friendship which, during its existence, had been lacking in those sterling qualities necessary for endurance. That it was pleasant while it lasted was the best that could be said of it. When he and Vanbrugh grew to manhood there was a wide divergence in their paths.

One walked with firm unfaltering step the road which leads to honour and renown, sparing no labour, throwing aside seductive temptation when it presented itself to him, as it did in its most alluring forms, giving all his mental might to the cause to which he had devoted himself, studying by day and night so earnestly that his bright and strong intellect became stronger and clearer, and he could scarcely miss success. Only once in his younger days had he allowed himself, for a brief period, to be seduced from this path, and it was John Vanbrugh who had tempted him.

The other threw himself upon pleasure's tide, and, blind to earnest duty, drank the sunshine of life's spring-time in draughts so intemperate that he became intoxicated with poisonous fire, and, falling into the arms of the knaves who thrive on human weakness and depravity, his moral sense, like theirs, grew warped, and he ripened into a knave himself.

Something of this, but not in its fulness, had reached the Advocate's ears, making but small impression upon him, and exciting no surprise, for by that time his judgment was matured, and human character was an open book to him; and when, some little while afterwards, he heard that John Vanbrugh was dead, he said, "He is better dead," and scarcely gave his once friend another thought.

He was a man who had no pity for the weak, and no forgiveness for the erring.

He walked slowly, with a calm enjoyment of the soli-

tude and the quiet night, and presently entered a narrow lane, dotted with orchards.

It was now dark, and he could not see a dozen yards before him. He was fond of darkness; it contained mysterious possibilities, he had been heard to say. There was an ineffable charm in the stillness which encompassed him, and he enjoyed it to its full. There were cottages here and there, lying back from the road, but no light or movement in them; the inmates were asleep. Soft sighs proceeded from the drowsy trees, and slender boughs waved solemnly, while the only sounds from the farmyards were, at intervals, a muffled shaking of wings, and the barking of dogs whom his footsteps had aroused. As he passed a high wooden gate, through the bars of which he could dimly discern a line of tall trees standing like sentinels of the night, the perfume of limes was wafted towards him, and he softly breathed the words:

“My wife!”

He yielded up his senses to the thralldom of a delicious languor, in which the only image was that of the fair and beautiful woman who was waiting for him in their holiday home. Had any person seen the tender light in his eyes, and heard the tone in which the words were whispered, he could not have doubted that the woman they referred to was passionately adored.

Not for long was he permitted to muse upon the image of a being the thought of whom appeared to transform a passionless man into an ardent lover; a harsher interruption than sweet perfume floating on a breeze recalled him to his sterner self.

“Stop!”

“For what reason?”

“The best. Money!”

The summons proceeded from one in whom, as his voice betrayed, the worst passions were dominant.

CHAPTER III

IN THE DEAD OF NIGHT

THERE lived not in the world a man more fearless than the Advocate. At this threatening demand, which meant violence, perhaps murder, he exhibited as little trepidation as he would have done at an acquaintance asking him, in broad daylight, for a pinch of snuff. Indeed, he was so perfectly unembarrassed that his voice assumed a lightness foreign to its usual serious tones.

“Money, my friend! How much?”

“All you’ve got.”

“Terse, and to the point. If I refuse?”

“I am desperate. Look to yourself.”

The Advocate smiled, and purposely deepened the airiness of his tones.

“This is a serious business, then?”

“You’ll find it so, if you trifle with me.”

“Are you hungry?”

“I am starving.”

“You have a powerful voice for a starving man.”

“Don’t play with me, master. I mean to have what I ask for.”

“How can you, if I do not possess it? How will you if, possessing it, I refuse to give it you?”

The reply was a crashing blow at an overhanging branch, which broke it to the ground. It was evident that the man carried a stout weapon, and that he meant to use it, with murderous effect, if driven to extremes. They spoke at arm’s-length; neither was quite within the other’s grasp.

“A strong argument,” said the Advocate, without blenching, “and a savage one. You have a staff in your hand, and, probably, a knife in your pocket.”

“Ah, I have, and a sharp blade to it.”

“I thought as much. Would not that do your business more effectually?”

“Perhaps. But I’ve learnt a lesson to-day about knives, which teaches me not to use mine too freely.”

The Advocate frowned.

"Other scoundrels would run less risk of the gaol if their proceedings were as logical. Do you know me?"

"How should I?"

"It might be, then," continued the Advocate, secretly taking a box of matches from his pocket, "that, like yourself, I am both a thief and a would-be murderer."

As he uttered the last words he flung a lighted match straight at the man's face, and for a moment the glare revealed the ruffian's features. He staggered back, repeating the word "Murderer!" in a hoarse startled whisper. The Advocate strode swiftly to his side, and striking another match, held it up to his own face.

"Look at me, Gautran," he said.

The man looked up, and recognising the Advocate, recoiled, muttering:

"Aye, aye—I see who it is."

"And you would rob me, wretch!"

"Not now, master, not now. Your voice—it was the voice of another man. I crave your pardon, humbly."

"So—you recommence work early, Gautran. Have you not had enough of the gaol?"

"More than enough. Don't be hard on me, master; call me mad if you like."

"Mad or sane, Gautran, every man is properly made accountable for his acts. Take this to heart."

"It won't do me any good. What is a poor wretch to do with nothing but empty pockets?"

"You are a dull-witted knave, or you would be aware it is useless to lie to me. Gautran, I can read your soul. You wished to speak to me in the court. Here is your opportunity. Say what you had to say."

"Give me breathing time. You've the knack of driving the thoughts clean out of a man's head. Have you got a bit of something that a poor fellow can chew—the end of a cigar, or a nip of tobacco?"

"I have nothing about me but money, which you can't chew, and should not have if you could. Hearken, my friend. When you said you were starving, you lied to me."

"How do you know it?"

"Fool! Are there not fruit-trees here, laden with wholesome food, within any thief's grasp? Your pockets at this moment are filled with fruit."

"You have a gift," said Gautran with a cringing movement of his body. "It would be an act of charity to put me in the way of it."

"What would you purchase?" asked the advocate ironically. "Gold, for wine, and pleasure, and fine clothes?"

"Aye, master," replied Gautran with eager voice.

"Power, to crush those you hate, and make them smart and bleed?"

"Aye, master. That would be fine."

"Gautran, these things are precious, and have their price. What are you ready to pay for them?"

"Anything—anything but money!"

"Something of less worth—your soul?"

Gautran shuddered and crossed himself.

"No, no," he muttered; "not that—not that!"

"Strange," said the Advocate with a contemptuous smile, "the value we place upon an unknown quantity! We cannot bargain, friend. Say now what you desire to say, and as briefly as you can."

But it was some time before Gautran could sufficiently recover himself to speak with composure.

"I want to know," he said at length, with a clicking in his throat, "whether you've been paid for what you did for me?"

"At your trial?"

"Aye, master."

"I have not been paid for what I did for you."

"When they told me yonder," said Gautran after another pause, pointing in the direction of Geneva, where the prison lay, "that you were to appear for me, they asked me how I managed it, but I couldn't tell them, and I'm beating my head now to find out, without getting any nearer to it. There must be a reason."

"You strike a key-note, my friend."

"Someone has promised to pay you."

"No one has promised to pay me."

"You puzzle and confuse me, master. You're a stranger in Geneva, I'm told."

"It is true."

"I've lived about here half my life. I was born in Sierre. My father worked in the foundry, my mother in the fields. You are not a stranger in Sierre."

"I am a stranger there; I never visited the town."

"My father was born in Martigny. You knew my father."

"I did not know your father."

"My mother—her father once owned a vineyard. You knew her."

"I did not know her."

Once more was Gautran silent. What he desired now to say raised up images so terrifying that he had not the courage to give it utterance.

"You are in deep shadow, my friend," said the Advocate, "body and soul. Shall I tell you what is in your mind?"

"You can do that?"

"You wish to know if I was acquainted with the unhappy girl with whose murder you were charged."

"Is there another in the world like you?" asked Gautran, with fear in his voice. "Yes, that is what I want to know."

"I was not acquainted with her."

Gautran retreated a step or two, in positive terror. "Then what," he exclaimed, "in the fiend's name made you come forward?"

"At length," said the Advocate, "we arrive at an interesting point in our conversation. I thank you for the opportunity you afford me in questioning my inner self. What made me come forward to the assistance of such a scoundrel? Humanity? No. Sympathy? No. What, then, was my motive? Indeed, friend, you strike home. Shall I say I was prompted by a desire to assist the course of justice—or by a contemptible feeling of vanity to engage in a contest for the simple purpose of proving myself the victor? It was something of both, mayhap. Do you know, Gautran, a kind of self-despiseal stirs within me at the present moment? You do not understand me? I will give you a close illustration. You are a thief."

"Yes, master."

"You steal sometimes from habit, to keep your hand in as it were, and you feel a certain satisfaction at having accomplished your theft in a workmanlike manner. We are all of us but gross and earthly patches. It is simply a question of degree, and it is because I am in an idle mood—indeed, I am grateful to you for this playful hour—that I make a confession to you which would not elevate me in the eyes of better men. You were anxious to know whether I have been paid for my services. I now acknowledge payment. I accept as my fee the recreation you have afforded me."

"I shall be obliged to you, master," said Gautran, "if you will leave your mysteries, and come back to my trial."

"I will oblige you. I read the particulars of the case for the first time on my arrival here, and it appeared to me almost impossible you could escape conviction. It was simply that. I examined you, and saw the legal point which, villain as you are, proclaimed your innocence. That laugh of yours, Gautran; has no mirth in it. I am beginning to be dangerously shaken. I will do, I said then, for this wretch what I believe no other man can do. I will perform a miracle."

"You have done it!" cried Gautran, falling on his knees in a paroxysm of fear, and kissing the Advocate's hand, which was instantly snatched away. "You are great—you are the greatest! You knew the truth!"

"The truth!" echoed the Advocate, and his face grew ashen white.

"Aye, the truth—and you were sent to save me. You can read the soul; nothing is hidden from you. But you have not finished your work. You can save me entirely—you can, you can! Oh, master, finish your work, and I will be your slave to the last hour of my life!"

"Save you! From what?" demanded the Advocate. He was compelled to exercise great control over himself, for a horror was stealing upon him.

The trembling wretch rose, and pointed to the opposite roadside.

"From shadows—from dreams—from the wild eyes of Madeline! Look there—look there!"

The Advocate turned in the direction of Gautran's outstretched trembling hand. A pale light was coming into the sky, and weird shadows were on the earth.

"What are you gazing on?"

"You ask me to torture me," moaned Gautran. "She dogs me like my shadow—I cannot shake her off! I have threatened her, but she does not heed me. She is waiting—there—there—to follow me when I am alone—to put her arms about me—to breathe upon my face, and turn my heart to ice! If I could hold her, I would tear her piecemeal! You *must* have known her, you who can read what passes in a man's soul—you who knew the truth when you came to me in my cell! She will not obey me, but she will you. Command her, compel her to leave me, or she will drive me mad!"

With amazing strength the Advocate placed his hands on Gautran's shoulders, and twisted the man's face so close to his own that not an inch of space divided them. Their eyes met, Gautran's wavering and dilating with fear, the Advocate's fixed and stern, and with a fire in them terrible to behold.

"Recall," said the Advocate, in a clear voice that rang through the night like a bell, "what passed between you and Madeline on the last night of her life. Speak!"

CHAPTER IV

THE CONFESSION

"**I** SOUGHT her in the Quartier St. Gervais," said Gautran, speaking like a man in a dream, "and found her at eight o'clock in the company of a man. I watched them, and kept out of their sight.

"He was speaking to her softly, and some things he said to her made her smile; and every time she showed her white teeth I swore that she should be mine and mine alone. They remained together for an hour, and then they parted, he going one way, Madeline another.

"I followed her along the banks of the river, and when no one was near us I spoke to her. She was not pleased

with my company, and bade me leave her, but I replied that I had something particular to say to her, and did not intend to go till it was spoken.

“It was a dark night; there was no moon.

“I told her I had been watching her, and that I knew she had another lover. ‘Do you mean to give me up?’ I said, and she answered that she had never accepted me, and that after that night she would never see me again. I said it might happen, and that it might be the last night we should ever see each other. She asked me if I was going away, and I said no, it might be her that was going away on the longest journey she had ever taken. ‘What journey?’ she asked, and I answered, a journey with Death for the coachman, for I had sworn a dozen times that night that if she would not swear upon her cross to be true and faithful to me, I would kill her.

“I said it twice, and some persons passed and turned to look at us, but there was not light enough to see us clearly.

“Madeline would have cried to them for help, but I held my hand over her mouth, and whispered that if she uttered a word it would be her last, and that she need not be frightened, for I loved her too well to do her any harm.

“But when we were alone again, and no soul was near us, I told her again that as sure as there was a sky above us I would kill her, unless she swore to give up her other lover, and be true to me. She said she would promise, and she put her little hand in mine and pressed it, and said:

“‘Gautran, I will be only yours; now let us go back.’

“But I told her it was not enough; that she must kneel, and swear upon the holy cross that she would have nothing to do with any man but me. I forced her upon her knees, and knelt by her side, and put the cross to her lips; and then she began to sob and tremble. She dared not put her soul in peril, she said; she did not love me—how could she swear to be true to me?

“I said it was that or death, and that it would be the blackest hour of my life to kill her, but that I meant to do it if she would not give in to me. I asked her for the

last time whether she would take the oath, and she said she daren't. Then I told her to say a prayer, for she had not five minutes to live. She started to her feet and ran along the bank. I ran after her, and she stumbled and fell to the ground, and before she could escape me again I had her in my arms to fling her into the river.

"She did not scratch or bite me, but clung to me, and her tears fell all about my face. I said to her:

" 'You love me, kissing me so; swear then; it is not too late!'

"But she cried:

"No, no! I kiss you so that you may not have the heart to kill me!'

"Soon she got weak, and her arms had no power in them, and I lifted her high in the air, and flung her far from me into the river.

"I waited a minute or two, and thought she was dead, but then I heard a bubbling and a scratching, and, looking down, saw that by a miracle she had got back to the river's brink, and that there was yet life in her. I pulled her out, and she clung to me in a weak way, and whispered, nearly choked the while, that the Virgin Mary would not let me kill her.

"Will you take the oath?' I asked, and she shook her head from side to side.

" 'No! no! no!'

"I took my handkerchief, and tied it tight round her neck, and she smiled in my face. Then I lifted her up, and threw her into the river again.

"I saw her no more that night!"

* * * * *

The Advocate removed his eyes, with a shudder, from the eyes of the wretch who had made this horrible confession, and who now sank to the ground, quivering in every limb, crying:

"Save me, master, save me!"

"Monster!" exclaimed the Advocate. "Live and die accursed!"

But the terror-stricken man did not hear the words, and the Advocate, upon whose features, during Gautran's

narration, a deep gloom had settled, strode swiftly from him through the peaceful narrow lane, fragrant with the perfume of limes, at the end of which the lights in the House of White Shadows were shining a welcome to him.

BOOK III.—THE GRAVE OF HONOUR.

CHAPTER I

PREPARATIONS FOR A VISITOR

AT noon the same day the old housekeeper, Mother Denise, and her pretty granddaughter Dionetta were busily employed setting in order and arranging the furniture in a suite of rooms intended for an expected visitor. There were but two floors in the House of White Shadows, and the rooms in which Mother Denise and Dionetta were busy were situated on the upper floor.

“I think they will do now,” said Mother Denise, wiping imaginary dust away with her apron.

“All but the flowers,” said Dionetta. “No, grandmother, that desk is wrong; it is my lady’s own desk, and is to be placed exactly in this corner, by the window. There—it is right now. Be sure that everything is in its proper place, and that the rooms are sweet and bright—be sure—be sure! She has said that twenty times this week.”

“Ah,” said Mother Denise testily, “as if butterflies could teach bees how to work! My lady is turning your head, Dionetta, it is easy to see that; she has bewitched half the people in the village. Here is father, with the flowers. Haste, Martin, haste!”

“Easy to say, hard to do,” grumbled Martin, entering slowly with a basket of cut flowers. “My bones get more obstinate every day. Here’s my lady been teasing me out of my life to cut every flower worth looking at. She would have made the garden a wilderness, and spoilt every bed, if I had not argued with her.”

“And what did she say,” asked Mother Denise, “when you argued with her?”

"Say? Smiled, and showed all her white teeth at once. I never saw such teeth in my young days, nor such eyes, nor such hair, nor such hands—enough to drive a young man crazy."

"Or an old one either," interrupted Mother Denise. "She smiled as sweet as honey—you silly old man—and wheedled you, and wheedled you, till she got what she wanted."

"Pretty well, pretty well. You see, Dionetta, there are two ways of getting a thing done, a soft way and a hard way."

"There, there, there!" cried Mother Denise impatiently. "Do your work with a still tongue, and let us do ours. Get back to the garden, and repair the mischief my lady has caused you to do. What does a man want with a room full of roses?" she muttered, when Martin, quick to obey his domestic tyrant, had gone.

"It is a welcome home," said Dionetta. "If I were absent from my place a long, long while, it would make me feel glad when I returned, to see my rooms as bright as this. It is as though the very roses remembered you."

"You are young," said Mother Denise, "and your thoughts go the way of roses. I can't blame you, Dionetta."

"It was ten years since the master was here, you have told me, grandmother."

"Yes, Dionetta, yes, ten years ago this summer, and even then he did not sleep in the house. Christian Almer hates the place, and of all the rooms in the villa, this is the room he would be most anxious to avoid."

"But why, grandmother?" asked Dionetta, her eyes growing larger and rounder with wonder; "and does my lady know it?"

"My lady is a headstrong woman; she would not listen to me when I advised her to select other rooms for the young master, and she declares—in a light way to be sure, but these are not things to make light of—that she is very disappointed to find that the villa is not haunted. Haunted! I have never seen anything, nor has Martin, nor you, Dionetta."

“ Oh, grandmother ! ” said the girl, in a timid voice, “ I don’t know whether I have or not. Sometimes I have fancied—— ”

“ Of course you have fancied, and that is all ; and you have woke up in the night, and been frightened by nothing. Mark me, Dionetta, if you do no wrong, and think no wrong, you will never see anything of the White Shadows of this house.”

“ I am certain,” said Dionetta, more positively, “ when I have been almost falling asleep, that I have heard them creeping, creeping past the door. I have listened to them over and over again, without daring to move in bed. Indeed I have.”

“ I am certain,” retorted Mother Denise, “ that you have heard nothing of the kind. You are a foolish, silly girl to speak of such things. You put me quite out of patience, child.”

“ But Fritz says—— ”

“ Fritz is a fool, a cunning, lazy fool. If I were the owner of this property I would pack him off. There’s no telling which master he serves—Christian Almer or Master Pierre Lamont. He likes his bread buttered on both sides, and accepts money from both gentlemen. That is not the conduct of a faithful servant. If I acted in such a manner I should consider myself disgraced.”

“ I am sure,” murmured Dionetta, “ that Fritz has done nothing to disgrace himself.”

“ Let those who are older than you,” said Mother Denise, in a sharp tone, “ be judges of that. Fritz is good for nothing but to chatter like a magpie and idle round the place from morning to night. When there’s work to do, as there has been this week, carrying furniture and moving heavy things about, he must run away to the city, to the court-house where that murderer is being tried. Dionetta, I am not in love with the Advocate or his lady. The Advocate is trying to get a murderer off ; it may be the work of a clever man, but it is not the work of a good man. If I had a son, I would sooner have him good than clever ; and I would sooner you married a good man than a clever one. I hope you are not thinking of marrying a fool.”

"Oh, grandmother, whoever thinks of marrying?"

"Not you, of course, child—would you have me believe that? When I was your age I thought of nothing else, and when you are my age you will see the folly of it. No, I am not in love with the Advocate. He is performing unholy work down there in Geneva. The priest says as much. If that murderer escapes from justice, the guilt of blood will weigh upon the Advocate's soul."

"Oh, grandmother! If my lady heard you she would never forgive you."

"If she hears it, it will not be from my tongue. Dionetta, it was a young girl who was murdered, about the same age as yourself. It might have been you—ah, you may well turn white—and this clever lawyer, this stranger it is, who comes among us to prevent justice being done upon a murderous wretch. He will be punished for it, mark my words."

Dionetta, who knew how useless it was to oppose her grandmother's opinions, endeavoured to change the subject by saying:

"Tell me, grandmother, why Mr. Almer should be more anxious to avoid this room than any other room in the house? I think it is the prettiest of all."

Mother Denise did not reply. She looked round her with the air of a woman recalling a picture of long ago.

"The story connected with this part of the house," she presently said, "gave to the villa the name of the House of White Shadows. You are old enough to hear it. Let me see, let me see. Christian Almer is now thirty-one years old—yes, thirty-one on his last birthday. How time passes! I remember well the day he was born——"

"Hush, grandmother," said Dionetta, holding up her hand. "My lady."

The Advocate's wife had entered the room quietly, and was regarding the arrangements with approval.

"It is excellently done," she said, "exactly as I wished. Dionetta, it was you who arranged the flowers?"

"Yes, my lady."

"You have exquisite taste, really exquisite. Mother Denise, I am really obliged to you."

"I have done nothing," said Mother Denise, "that it was not my duty to do."

"Such an unpleasant way of putting it; for there is a way of doing things——"

"Just what grandfather said," cried Dionetta, gleefully, "a hard way and a soft way." And then becoming suddenly aware of her rudeness in interrupting her mistress, she curtsied, and with a bright colour in her face, said, "I beg your pardon, my lady."

"There's no occasion, child," said Adelaide graciously. "Grandfather is quite right, and everything in this room has been done beautifully." She held a framed picture in her hand, a coloured cabinet photograph of herself, and she looked round the walls to find a place for it. "This will do," she said, and she took down the picture of a child which hung immediately above her desk, and put her own in its stead. "It is nice," she said to Mother Denise, smiling, "to see the faces of old friends about us. Mr. Almer and I are very old friends."

"The picture you have taken down," said Mother Denise, "is of Christian Almer when he was a child."

"Indeed! How old was he then?"

"Five years, my lady."

"He was a handsome boy. His hair and eyes are darker now. You were speaking of him, Mother Denise, as I entered. You were saying he was thirty-one last birthday, and that you remember the day he was born."

"Yes, my lady."

"And you were about to tell Dionetta why this villa was called the House of White Shadows. Give me the privilege of hearing the story."

"I would rather not relate it, my lady."

"Nonsense, nonsense! If Dionetta may hear it, there can be no objection to me. Mr. Almer would be quite angry if he knew you refused me so simple a thing. Listen to what he says in his last letter," and Adelaide took a letter from her pocket, and read: "'Mother Denise, the housekeeper, and the most faithful servant of the house, will do everything in her power to make you com-

fortable and happy. She will carry out your wishes to the letter—tell her, if necessary, that it is my desire, and that she is to refuse you nothing.’ Now, you dear old soul, are you satisfied?”

“Well, my lady, if you insist——”

“Of course I insist, you dear creature. I am sure there is no one in the village who can tell a story half as well as you. Come and stand by me, Dionetta, for fear of ghosts.”

She seated herself before the desk, upon which she laid the picture of the lad, and Mother Denise, who was really by no means loth to recall old reminiscences, and who, as she proceeded, derived great enjoyment herself from her narration, thus commenced:

CHAPTER II

A LOVE STORY OF THE PAST

“**I** WAS born in this house, my lady; my mother was housekeeper here before me. I am sixty-eight years old, and I have never slept a night away from the villa; I hope to die here. Until your arrival the house has not been inhabited for more than twenty years. I dare say if Mr. Christian Almer, the present master, had the power to sell the estate, he would have done so long ago, but he is bound by his father’s will not to dispose of it while he lives. So it has been left to our care all these years.

“Christian Almer’s father lived here, and courted his young wife here; a very beautiful lady. That is her portrait hanging on the wall. It was painted by M. Gabriel, and is a faithful likeness of Mr. Christian Almer’s mother. His father, perhaps he may have told you, was a distinguished author; there are books upon the library shelves written by him. I will speak of him, if you please, as Mr. Almer, and my present master I will call Master Christian; it will make the story easier to tell.

“When Mr. Almer came into his property, which consisted of this villa and many houses and much land in other parts, all of which have been sold—this is the only

portion of the old estates which remains in the family—there were at least twenty servants employed here. He was fond of passing days and nights shut up with his books and papers, but he liked to see company about him. He had numerous friends and acquaintances, and money was freely spent; he would invite a dozen, twenty at a time, who used to come and go as they pleased, living in the house as if it were their own. Mr. Almer and his friends understood each other, and the master was seldom intruded upon. In his solitude he was very, very quiet, but when he came among his guests he was full of life and spirits. He seemed to forget his books, and his studies, and it was hard to believe he was the same gentleman who appeared to be so happy when he was in solitude. He was a good master, and although he appeared to pay no attention to what was passing around him, there was really very little that escaped his notice.

“At the time I speak of he was not a young man; he was forty-five years of age, and everybody wondered why he did not marry. He laughed, and shook his head when it was mentioned, and said sometimes that he was too old, sometimes that he was happy enough with his books, sometimes that if a man married without loving and being loved he deserved every kind of misfortune that could happen to him; and then he would say that, cold as he might appear, he worshipped beauty, and that it was not possible he could marry any but a young and beautiful woman. I have heard the remark made to him that the world was full of young and beautiful women, and have heard him reply that it was not likely one would fall at the feet of a man of his age.

“My mother and I were privileged servants—my mother had been his nurse, and he had an affection for her—so that we had opportunities of hearing and knowing more than the others.

“One summer there came to the villa, among the visitors, an old gentleman and his wife, and their daughter. The young lady’s name was Beatrice.

“She was one of the brightest beings I have ever beheld, with the happiest face and the happiest laugh, and a step as light as a fairy’s. I do not know how many

people fell in love with her—I think all who saw her. My master, Mr. Almer, was one of these, but, unlike her other admirers, he shunned rather than followed her. He shut himself up with his books for longer periods, and took less part than ever in the gaieties and excursions which were going on day after day. No one would have supposed that her beauty and her winning ways had made any impression upon him.

“It is not for me to say whether the young lady, observing this, as she could scarcely help doing, resolved to attract him to her. When we are young we act from impulse, and do not stop to consider consequences. It happened, however, and she succeeded in wooing him from his books. But there was no love-making on his part, as far as anybody could see, and his conduct gave occasion for no remarks; but I remember it was spoken of among the guests that the young lady was in love with our master, and we all wondered what would come of it.

“Soon afterwards a dreadful accident occurred.

“The gentlemen were out riding, and were not expected home till evening, but they had not been away more than two hours before Mr. Almer galloped back in a state of great agitation. He sought Mdlle. Beatrice’s mother, and communicated the news to her, in a gentle manner you may be sure. Her husband had been thrown from his horse, and was being carried to the villa dreadfully hurt and in a state of insensibility. Mr. Almer’s great anxiety was to keep the news from Mdlle. Beatrice, but he did not succeed. She rushed into the room and heard all.

“She was like one distracted. She flew out of the villa in her white dress, and ran along the road the horsemen had taken. Her movements were so quick that they could not stop her, but Mr. Almer ran after her, and brought her back to the house in a fainting condition. A few minutes afterwards the old gentleman was brought in, and the house was a house of mourning. No dancing, no music, no singing; all was changed; we spoke in whispers, and moved about slowly, just as if a funeral was about to take place. The doctors gave no hopes; they said he might linger in a helpless state for weeks, but that it was impossible he could recover.

“Of course this put an end to all the festivities, and one after another the guests took their departure, until in a little while the only visitors remaining were the family upon whom such a heavy blow had fallen.

“Mr. Almer no longer locked himself up in his study, but devoted the whole of his time to Mdlle. Beatrice and her parents. He asked me to wait upon Mdlle. Beatrice, and to see that her slightest wish was gratified. I found her very quiet and very gentle; she spoke but little, and the only thing she showed any obstinacy in was in insisting upon sitting by her father's bedside a few hours every day. I had occasion, not very long afterwards, to learn that when she set her mind upon a thing, it was not easy to turn her from it. These gentle, delicate creatures, sometimes, are capable of as great determination as the strongest man.

“‘Denise,’ said Mr. Almer to me, ‘the doctors say that if Mdlle. Beatrice does not take exercise she will herself become seriously ill. Prevail upon her to enjoy fresh air: walk with her in the garden an hour or so every day, and amuse her with light talk; a nature like hers requires sunshine.’

“I did my best to please Mr. Almer; the weather was fine, and not a day passed that Mdlle. Beatrice did not walk with me in the grounds. And here Mr. Almer was in the habit of joining us. When he came, I fell back, and he and Mdlle. Beatrice walked side by side, sometimes arm in arm, and I a few yards behind.

“I could not help noticing the wonderful kindness of his manner towards her; it was such as a father might show for a daughter he loved very dearly. ‘Well, well!’ I thought. I seemed to see how it would all end, and I believed it would be a good ending, although there were such a number of years between them—he forty-five, and she seventeen.

“A month passed in this way, and the old gentleman's condition became so critical that we expected every moment to hear of his death. The accident had deprived him of his senses, and it was only two days before his death that his mind became clear. Then a long private interview took place between him and Mr. Almer, which

left my master more than ever serious, and more than ever gentle towards Mdlle. Beatrice.

"I was present when the old gentleman died. He had lost the power of speech; his wife was sitting by his bedside holding his hand; his daughter was on her knees with her face buried in the bed-clothes; Mr. Almer was standing close, looking down upon them; I was at the end of the room waiting to attend upon Mdlle. Beatrice. She was overwhelmed with grief, but her mother's trouble, it appeared to me, was purely selfish. She seemed to be thinking of what would become of her when her husband was gone. The dying gentleman suddenly looked into my master's face, and then turned his eyes upon his daughter, and my master inclined his head gravely, as though he was answering a question. A peaceful expression came upon the sufferer's face, and in a very little while he breathed his last."

Here Mother Denise paused and broke off in her story, saying:

"I did not know it would take so long a-telling; I have wearied you, my lady."

"Indeed not," said the Advocate's wife; "I don't know when I have been so much interested. It is just like reading a novel. I am sure there is something startling to come. You must go on to the end, Mother Denise, if you please."

"With your permission, my lady," said Mother Denise, and smoothing down her apron, she continued the narrative.

CHAPTER VII

A MOTHER'S TREACHERY

"TWO days after Mdlle. Beatrice's father was buried, Mr. Almer said to me:

"Denise, I am compelled to go away on business, and I shall be absent a fortnight at least. I leave Mdlle. Beatrice in your care. As a mark of faithful service to me, be sure that nothing is left undone to comfort both her and her mother in their great trouble.'

"I understood without his telling me that it was really Mdlle. Beatrice he was anxious about; everyone who had any experience of the old lady knew that she was very well able to take care of herself.

"On the same day a long conversation took place between my master and the widow, and before sundown he departed.

"It got to be known that he had gone to look after the affairs of the gentleman who died here, and that the ladies, instead of being rich, as we had supposed them to be, were in reality very poor, and likely to be thrown upon the world in a state of poverty, unless they accepted assistance from Mr. Almer. They were much worse off than poor people; having been brought up as ladies, they could do nothing to help themselves.

"While Mr. Almer was away, Mdlle. Beatrice and I became almost friends, I may say. She took great notice of me, and appeared to be glad to have me with her. The poor young lady had no one else, for there was not much love lost between her and her mother. The selfish old lady did nothing but bewail her own hard fate, and spoke to her daughter as if the young lady could have nothing to grieve at in being deprived of a father's love.

"But sorrow does not last forever, my lady, even with the old, and the young shake it off much more readily. So it was, to my mind, quite natural, when Mr. Almer returned, which he did after an absence of fifteen days, that he should find Mdlle. Beatrice much more cheerful than when he left. He was pleased to say that it was my doing, and that I should have no cause to regret it to the last day of my life. I had done so little that the great store he set upon it made me think more and more of the ending to it all. There could be but one natural ending, a marriage, and yet never for one moment had I seen him conduct himself toward Mdlle. Beatrice as a lover. He brought bad news back with him, and when he communicated it to the old lady she walked about the grounds like a distracted person, moaning and wringing her hands.

"I got to know about it, through my young lady. We were out walking in the lanes when we overtook two wretched-looking women, one old and one young. They

were in rags, and their white faces and slow, painful steps, as they dragged one foot after another, would have led anybody to suppose that they had not eaten a meal for days. They were truly misery's children.

"Mdlle. Beatrice asked in a whisper, as they turned and looked pitifully at her:

" 'Who are they, Denise?'

" 'They are beggars,' I answered.

"She took out her purse, and spoke to them, and gave them some money. They thanked her gratefully, and crawled away, Mdlle. Beatrice looking after them with an expression of thoughtfulness and curiosity in her lovely face.

"Denise,' she said presently, 'Mr. Almer, who, before my father's death, promised to look after his affairs, has told us we are beggars.'

"I was very, very sorry to hear it, but I could not reconcile the appearance of the bright young creature standing before me with that of the wretched beings who had just left us; and although she spoke gravely, and said the news was shocking, she did not seem to feel it as much as her words would have led one to believe. It was a singular thing, my lady, that Mdlle. Beatrice wore black for her father for only one day. There was quite a scene between her and her mother on the subject, but the young lady had her way, and only wore her black dress for a few hours.

" 'I hate it,' she said; 'it makes me feel as if I were dead.'

"I am sure it was not because she did not love her father that she refused to put on mourning for him. Never, except on that one day, did I see her wear any dress but white, and the only bits of colour she put on were sometimes a light pink or a light blue ribbon. That is how it got to be said, when she was seen from a distance walking in the grounds:

" 'She looks like a white shadow.'

"So when she told me she was a beggar, and stood before me, fair and beautiful, dressed in soft white, with a pink ribbon at her throat, and long coral earrings in her ears, I could not understand how it was possible she

could be what she said. It was true, though; she and her mother had not a franc, and Mr. Almer, who brought the news, did not seem to be sorry for it. The widow cried for days and days—did nothing but cry and cry, but that, of course, could not go on forever, and in time she became, to all appearance, consoled. No guests were invited to the villa, and my master was alone with Mdlle. Beatrice and her mother.

“It seemed to me, after a time, that he made many attempts to get back into his old groove; but he was not his own master, and could not do as he pleased. Now it was Mdlle. Beatrice who wanted him, now it was her mother, and as they were in a measure dependent upon him he could not deny himself to them. He might have done so had they been rich; he could not do so as they were poor. I soon saw that when Mdlle. Beatrice intruded herself upon him it was at the instigation of her mother, and that, had she consulted her own inclination, she would have retired as far into the background as he himself desired to be. The old lady, however, had set her heart upon a scheme, and she left no stone unturned to bring it about. Oh, she was cunning and clever, and they were not a match for her, neither her daughter, who knew nothing of the world, nor Mr. Almer, who, deeply read as he was, and clever, and wise in many things, knew as little of worldly ways as the young lady he loved and was holding aloof from. For this was clear to me and to others, though I dare say our master had no idea that his secret was known—indeed, that it was common talk.

“One morning I had occasion to go into Geneva to purchase things for the house, which I was to bring back with me in the afternoon. As I was stepping into the waggon, Mdlle. Beatrice came out of the gates and said:

“‘Denise, will you pass the post-office in Geneva?’

“‘Yes, mademoiselle,’ I replied.

“‘Here is a letter,’ she then said, ‘I have just written, and I want it posted there at once. Will you do it for me?’

“‘Certainly I will,’ I said, and I took the letter.

“ ‘Be sure you do not forget, Denise,’ she said, as she turned away.

“ ‘I will not forget, mademoiselle,’ I said.

“There was no harm in looking at the envelope; it was addressed to a M. Gabriel. I was not half a mile on the road to Geneva before I heard coming on behind me very fast the wheels of a carriage. We drove aside to let it pass; it was one of our own carriages, and the old lady was in it.

“ ‘Ah, Denise,’ she said, are you going to Geneva?’

“ ‘Yes, my lady.’

“ ‘I shall be there an hour before you; I am going to the post-office to get some letters.’ As she said that I could not help glancing at the letter Mdlle. Beatrice had given me, which I held in my hand for safety. ‘It is a letter my daughter has given you to post,’ she said.

“ ‘Yes, my lady,’ I could say nothing else.

“ ‘Give it to me,’ she said, ‘I know she wants it posted immediately. It does not matter who posts a letter.’

“She said this impatiently and haughtily, for I think I was hesitating. However, I could do nothing but give her the letter, and as I did not suspect anything wrong I said nothing of the adventure to Mdlle. Beatrice, especially as she did not speak of the letter to me. Had she done so, I might have explained that her mother had taken it from me to post, and quite likely—although I hope I am mistaken—the strange and dreadful events that occurred before three years passed by might have been avoided.

“ ‘The old lady was very civil to me after this, and would continually question me about my master.

“ ‘He has a great deal of property?’ she asked.

“ ‘Yes, madame.’

“ ‘He is very rich, Denise?’

“ ‘Yes, madame.’

“ ‘And comes from an old family?’

“ ‘Yes, madame.’

“ ‘It is a pity he writes books; but he is highly respected, is he not, Denise?’

“ ‘No gentleman stands higher, madame.’

“ ‘His nature, Denise—though it is exceedingly wrong

in me to ask, for I have had experience of it—his nature is very kind?’

“ ‘Very kind, madame, and very noble.’

“ A hundred questions of this kind were put to me, sometimes when the young lady was present, sometimes when the mother and I were alone. While this was going on, I often noticed that Mdlle. Beatrice came from her mother's room in great agitation. From a man these signs can be hidden; from a woman, no; man is too often blind to the ways of women. I am sure Mr. Almer knew nothing of what was passing between mother and daughter; but even if he had known he would not have understood the meaning of it—I did not at the time.

“ Well, all at once the old lady made her appearance among us with a face in which the greatest delight was expressed. She talked to the servants quite graciously, and nodded and smiled, and didn't know what to do to show how amiable she was. ‘What a change in the weather!’ we all said. The reason was soon forthcoming. Our master and her daughter were engaged to be married.

“ We were none of us sorry; we all liked Mdlle. Beatrice, and it was sad to think that a good old race would die out if Mr. Almer remained single all the days of his life. Yes, we talked over the approaching marriage, as did everybody in the village, with real pleasure, and if good feeling and sincere wishes could bring happiness, Mr. Almer and his young and beautiful wife that was to be could not have failed to enjoy it.

“ ‘It is true, mademoiselle, is it not?’ I asked of her. ‘I may congratulate you?’

“ ‘I am engaged to be married to Mr. Almer,’ she said, ‘if that is what you mean.’

“ ‘You will have a good man for your husband, mademoiselle,’ I said; ‘you will be very happy.’

“ But here was something in her manner that made me hope the approaching change in her condition would not make her proud. It was cold and distant—different from the way she had hitherto behaved to me.

“ So the old house was gay again; improvements and alterations were made, and very soon we were thronged

with visitors, who came and went, and laughed and danced, as though life were a perpetual holiday.

“But Mdlle. Beatrice was not as light-hearted as before; she moved about more slowly, and with a certain sadness. It was noticed by many. I thought, perhaps, that the contemplation of the change in her life made her more serious, or that she had not yet recovered the shock of her father’s death. The old lady was in her glory, ordering here and ordering there, and giving herself such airs that one might have supposed it was she who was going to get married, and not her daughter.

“Mr. Almer gave Mdlle. Beatrice no cause for disquiet; he was entirely and most completely devoted to her, and I am sure that no other woman in the world ever had a more faithful lover. He watched her every step, and followed her about with his eyes in a way that would have made any ordinary woman proud. As for presents, he did not know how to do enough for the beautiful girl who was soon to be his wife. I never saw such beautiful jewelry as he had made for her, and he seemed to be continually studying what to do to give her pleasure. If ever a woman ought to have been happy, she ought to have been.

CHAPTER IV

HUSBAND AND WIFE

“**W**ELL, they were married, and the day was never forgotten in the village. Mr. Almer made everybody merry, the children, the grown-up people, the poor, and the well-to-do. New dresses, ribbons, flags, flowers, music and feasting from morning to night—there was never seen anything like it. The bride, in her white dress and veil, was as beautiful as an angel, and Mr. Almer’s face had a light in it such as I had never seen before—it shone with pride, and joy, and happiness.

“In the afternoon they departed on their honeymoon tour, and the old lady was left mistress of the villa during the absence of the newly-married pair. She exercised her

authority in a way that was not pleasing to us. No wonder, therefore, that we looked upon her with dislike, and spoke of it as an evil day when she came among us; but that did not lessen our horror at an accident which befell her, and which led to her death.

“Mr. and Mrs. Almer had been absent barely three weeks when the old lady going into a distant part of the grounds where workmen were employed in building up some rocks to serve as an artificial waterfall, fell into a pit, and was so frightfully bruised and shaken that, when she was taken up, the doctors declared she could not live another twenty-four hours. Letters were immediately sent off to Mr. Almer, but there was no chance of his receiving them before the unfortunate old lady breathed her last. We did everything we could for her, and she took it into her head that she would have no one to attend to her but me.

“‘My daughter is fond of you,’ she said on her death-bed, ‘and will be pleased that I have chosen you before the other servants. Keep them all away from me.’

“It was many hours before she could be made to believe that there was no hope for her, and when the conviction was forced upon her, she cried, in a tone of great bitterness:

“‘This is a fatal house! First my husband—now me! Will Beatrice be the next?’

“And then she bemoaned her hard fate that she should have to die just at the time that a life of pleasure was spread before her. Yes, she spoke in that way, just as if she was a young girl, instead of an old woman with white hair. A life of pleasure! Do some people never think of another life, a life of rewards and punishments, according to their actions in this world? The old lady was one of these, I am afraid. Three or four hours before she died she said she must speak to me quite alone, and the doctors accordingly left the room.

“‘I want you to tell me the truth, Denise,’ she said; I had to place my ear quite close to her lips to hear her.

“‘I will tell you,’ I said.

“‘It would be a terrible sin to deceive a dying woman,’ she said.

"I answered I knew it was, and I would not deceive her.

" 'Beatrice ought to be happy,' she said; 'I have done my best to make her so—against her own wishes! But is it likely she should know better than her mother? You believe she will be happy, do you not, Denise?'

"I replied that I could not doubt it; that she had married a good man, against whom no person could breathe a word, a man who commanded respect, and who was looked upon by the poor as a benefactor—as indeed he was.

" 'That is what I thought,' said the dying woman; 'that is what I told her over and over again. A good man, a kind man, a rich man, very rich man! And then we were under obligations to him; had Beatrice refused him he might have humiliated us. There was no other way to repay him.'

"I could not help saying to her then that when Mr. Almer rendered a service to anyone he did not look for repayment.

" 'Ah,' she said impatiently, 'but we are of noble descent, and we never receive a favour without returning it. All I thought of was my daughter's happiness. And there was the future—hers as well as mine—it was dreadful to look forward to. Denise, did my daughter ever complain to you?'

" 'Never!' I answered.

" 'Did she ever say I was a hard mother to her—that I was leading her wrong—that I was selfish, and thought only of myself? Did she? Answer me truly.'

" 'Never,' I said, and I wondered very much to hear her speak in that way. 'She never spoke a single word against you. If she had any such thoughts it would not have been proper for her to have confided them to me. I am only a servant.'

" 'That is true,' she muttered. 'Beatrice has pride—yes, thank God, she has pride, and if she suffers can suffer in silence. But why should she suffer? She has everything—everything! I torment myself without cause. You remember the letter my daughter gave you to post—the one to M. Gabriel?'

“ ‘Yes, madame; you took it from me on the road. I hope I did not do wrong in parting with it. Mademoiselle Beatrice desired me to post it with my own hands.’

“ ‘You did right,’ she said. ‘It does not matter who posts a letter. You did not tell my daughter I took it from you?’

“ ‘No, madame.’

“ ‘You are faithful and judicious,’ she said, but her praise gave me no pleasure. ‘If I had lived I would have rewarded you. You must not repeat to my daughter or to Mr. Almer what I have been saying to you. Promise me.’

“ I gave her the promise, and then she said that perhaps she would give me a message to deliver to her daughter, her last message; but she must think of it first, and if she forgot it I was to ask her for it. After that she was quiet, and spoke to no one. A couple of hours passed, and I asked the doctors whether she had long to live. They said she could not live another hour. I then told them that she had asked me to remind her of a message she wished me to give to her daughter, and whether it was right I should disturb her. They said that the wishes of the dying should be respected, and that I should try to make her understand that death was very near. I put my face again very close to hers.

“ ‘Can you hear me?’ I asked.

“ ‘Who are you?’ she said.

“ Her words were but a breath, and I could only understand them by watching the movements of her lips.

“ ‘I am Denise.’

“ ‘Ah, yes,’ she replied. ‘Denise, that my daughter is fond of.’

“ ‘You wished to give me a message to your daughter.’

“ ‘I don’t know what it was. I have done everything for the best—yes, everything. And she was foolish enough to rebel, and to tell me that I might live to repent my work; but see how wrong she was. And presently she said: ‘Denise, when my daughter comes home ask her to forgive me.’

“ These were her last words. Before the sun rose the next morning she was dead.

“Mr. and Mrs. Almer arrived at the villa before she was buried. It was a shocking interruption to their honeymoon, and their appearance showed how much they suffered. It was as if the whole course of their lives had been turned; tears took the place of smiles, sorrow of joy. And how different was the appearance of the village! No feasting, no music and dancing; everybody was serious and sad.

“And all within one short month!

“I gave Mrs. Almer her mother’s dying message. When she heard the words such a smile came upon her lips as I hope never again to see upon a human face, it was so bitterly scornful and despairing.

“‘It is too late for forgiveness,’ she said, and not another word passed between us on the subject.

“Mrs. Almer did not wear mourning for her mother, nor did her husband wish her to do so. I remember his saying to her:

“With some races, white is the emblem of mourning; not for that reason, Beatrice, but because it so well becomes you, I like you best in white.’

“Now, as time went on, we all thought that the sadness which weighed upon Mrs. Almer’s heart, and which seemed to put lead into her feet, would naturally pass away, but weeks and months elapsed, and she remained the same. There used to be colour in her cheeks; it was all gone now—her face was as white as milk. Her eyes used to sparkle and brighten, but now there was never to be seen any gladness in them; and she, who used to smile so often, now smiled no more. She moved about like one who was walking slowly to her grave.

“Mr. Almer made great efforts to arouse her, but she met him with coldness, and when he spoke to her she simply answered ‘yes’ or ‘no,’ and she did nothing whatever to make his home cheerful and happy.

“This weighed upon his spirits, as it would upon the spirits of any man, and during those times I often saw him gazing upon her from a distance, when she was walking in the grounds, with a look in his eyes which denoted how troubled he was. Then, as if some thought had suddenly occurred to him, he would join her, and en-

deavour to entice her into conversation; but she answered him only when she was compelled, and he became so chilled by her manner that soon he would himself grow silent, and they would pace the garden round and round for an hour together in the most complete silence. It hurt one to see it. They were never heard to quarrel, and the little they said to each other was said in a gentle way; but that seemed to make matters worse. Much better to have spoken outright, so that they might have known what was in each other's minds. A storm now and then is naturally good; it clears the air, and the sun always shines when it is over; but here a silent storm was brooding which never burst, and the only signs of it were seen in the sad faces of those who were suffering, and who did not deserve to suffer.

"Imagine what the house was, my lady, and how we all felt, who loved our master, and would have loved our lady too, if she had allowed us. Cold as she was to us, we could not help pitying her. For my own part I used to think I would rather live in a hut with a quarrelsome husband who would beat and starve me, than lead such a life as my master and mistress were leading.

"Once more, after many months has passed in this dreadful way, my master suddenly resolved to make another attempt to alter things for the better. He locked up his study, and courted his wife with the perseverance and the love of a lover. It was really so, my lady. He gathered posies for her, and placed them on her desk and dressing-table; he spoke cheerfully to her, taking no apparent notice of her silence and reserve; he strove in a thousand little delicate ways to bring pleasure into her life.

" 'We will ride out to-day,' he would say.

" 'Very well,' she would answer.

"He would assist her into the saddle, and they would ride away, they two alone, he animated by but one desire—to make her happy; and they would return after some hours, the master with an expression of suffering in his face which he would strive in vain to hide, and she, sad, resigned, and uncomplaining. But that silence of hers! That voice so seldom heard, and, when heard, so gentle,

and soft, and pathetic! I would rather have been beaten with an oak stick every day of my life than have been compelled to endure it, as he was compelled. For there was no relief or escape for him except in the doing of what it was not in his nature to do—to be downright cruel to her, or to find another woman to love him. He would have had no difficulty in this, had he been so minded.

“Still he did not relax his efforts to alter things for the better. He bought beautiful books, and pictures, and dresses, and pet animals for her; he forgot nothing that a man could possibly think of to please a woman. He had frequently spoken to her of inviting friends to the villa, but she had never encouraged him to do so. Now, however, without consulting her, he called friends and acquaintances around him, and in a short time we were again overrun with company. She was the mistress of the house, and it would have been sinful in her to have neglected her duties as Mr. Almer’s wife. Many young people came to the villa, and among them one day appeared M. Gabriel, the artist who painted the picture.

CHAPTER V

THE GATHERING OF THE STORM

“**A**T about this time it was generally known that Mr. Almer expected to become a father within three or four months, and some people considered it strange that he should have selected the eve of an event so important for the celebration of social festivities. For my own part I thought it a proof of his wisdom that he should desire his wife to be surrounded by an atmosphere of cheerfulness on such an occasion. Innocent laughter, music, pleasant society—what better kind of medicine is there in the world? But it did not do my lady good. She moved about listlessly, without heart and without spirit, and not until M. Gabriel appeared was any change observable in her. The manner in which she received him was sufficiently remarkable. My lady was giving

me some instructions as Mr. Almer and a strange gentleman came towards us.

“ ‘Beatrice,’ said Mr. Almer, ‘let me introduce M. Gabriel to you. A friend whom I have not seen for years.’

“ She looked at M. Gabriel, and bowed, and when she raised her head, her face and neck were crimson; her eyes, too, had an angry light in them. M. Gabriel, also, whose natural complexion was florid, turned deathly white as his eyes fell upon her.

“ Whether Mr. Almer observed these signs I cannot say; they were plain enough to me, and I did not need anyone to tell me that those two had met before.

“ My lady turned from her husband and M. Gabriel in silence, and taking my arm walked into a retired part of the grounds. She could not have walked without assistance, for she was trembling violently; the moment we were alone her strength failed her, and she swooned dead away. I thought it prudent not to call or run for assistance, and I attended to her myself. Presently she recovered, and looking around with a frightened air, asked if any person but myself had seen her swoon. I answered ‘No,’ and for a moment I thought she had some intention of confiding in me, but she said nothing more than ‘Thank you, Denise; do not speak of my fainting to any person; it is only that I am weak, and that the least thing overcomes me. Be sure that no one hears of it.’ ‘No one shall from me, my lady,’ I said. She thanked me again, and pressed my hand, and then we went into the house.

“After that, there was no perceptible difference in her manner toward M. Gabriel than towards her other guests, but I, whose eyes were in a certain way opened, could not help observing that M. Gabriel watched with anxiety her every movement and every expression. The summer-house in which all those pictures are stored away was given to M. Gabriel for a studio, and there he painted and passed a great deal of his time. Mr. Almer often joined him there, and if appearances went for anything, they spent many happy hours together. About three weeks after M. Gabriel came to the villa my master took his wife into the studio, and they remained there for some time.

It was understood that my lady had been prevailed upon to allow M. Gabriel to paint her portrait. From that time my lady's visits to the summer-house were frequent, at first always in her husband's company, but afterwards occasionally alone. One day she said to me:

“‘Denise, I have often wished to ask you a question, but till lately have not thought it worth while.’

“‘I am ready to answer anything, my lady,’ I said.

“‘One morning,’ she said, after a pause, ‘shortly after my dear father died, I gave you a letter to post for me in Geneva.’

“‘Yes, my lady,’ I said, and it flashed upon me like a stroke of lightning that the letter she referred to was addressed to M. Gabriel. Never till that moment had I thought of it.

“‘Did you post the letter for me, Denise, as I desired you? Did you do so with your own hands? Do not tremble. Mistakes often happen without our being able to prevent them—even fatal mistakes sometimes. I saw you drive away with the letter in your hand. You did not lose it?’

“‘No, my lady; but before I had gone a mile on the road to Geneva, your mother overtook me, and said she knew you had given it to me to post immediately in Geneva, and that as she would be at the post-office a good hour before me—which was true—she would put it into the post with other letters.’

“‘And you gave her the letter, Denise?’

“‘Yes, my lady.’

“‘Did my mother desire you not to mention to me that she had taken the letter from you?’

“‘No, my lady, but on her deathbed——’

“‘I hesitated, and my mistress said, ‘Do not fear, Denise; you did no wrong. How should you know that a mother would conspire against her daughter's happiness? On her deathbed my mother spoke to you of that letter?’

“‘Yes, my lady, and asked me if I had told you that she had taken it from me. I answered no, and she said I had done right. My lady, in telling you this, I am breaking the promise I gave her; I hope to be forgiven.’

“ ‘It is right that you should tell me the truth, when I desire you, about an affair I entrusted to you. Had you told me of your own account, it might have been a sin.’

“ ‘I can see, my lady, that I should not have parted with the letter. I am truly sorry.’

“ ‘The fault was not yours, Denise: the wrong-doing was not yours. I should have instructed you not to part with the letter to anyone; although even then it could not have been prevented; you could not have refused my mother. The past is lost to us forever.’ Her eyes filled with tears, and she said, ‘We will not speak of this again, Denise.’

“And it was never mentioned again by either of us, though we both thought of it often enough.

“It was easy for me to arrive at an understanding of it. M. Gabriel and my mistress had been lovers, and had been parted and kept apart by my lady’s mother. The old lady had played a false and treacherous part towards her daughter, and by so doing had destroyed the happiness of her life.

“Whether my young lady thought that Mr. Almer had joined in the plot against her—that was what puzzled me a great deal at the time; but I was certain that he was innocent in the matter, as much a victim to the arts and wiles of a scheming old woman as the unfortunate lady he had married.

“The motive of the treachery was plain enough. M. Gabriel was poor, a struggling artist, with his place to make in the world. My master was rich; money and estates were his, and the old woman believed she would live to enjoy them if she could bring about a marriage between him and her daughter.

“She succeeded—too well did she succeed, and she met with her punishment. Though she was dead in her grave I had no pity for her, and her daughter, also, thought of her with bitterness. What misery is brought about by the mad worship of money which fills some persons’ souls! As though hearts count for nothing!

“I understood it all now—my lady’s unhappiness, her silence, the estrangement between her and her husband. How often did I repeat the sad words she had uttered!

‘The past is lost to us forever.’ Yes, it was indeed true. Sunshine had fled; a gloomy future was before her. Which was the most to be pitied—my lady, or her innocent, devoted husband, who lived in ignorance of the wrong which had been done?

“After the conversation I have just related, the behaviour of my mistress toward M. Gabriel underwent a change; she was gracious and familiar with him, and sometimes, as I noticed with grief, even tender. They walked frequently together; she was often in his studio when her husband was absent. Following out in my mind the course of events, I felt sure that explanations had passed between them, and that they were satisfied that neither had been intentionally false to the other. It was natural that this should have happened; but what good could come of this better understanding? Mischief was in the air, and no one saw it but myself.

“My lady recovered her cheerfulness; the colour came back to her face; her eyes were brighter, life once more appeared enjoyable to her. Mr. Almer was delighted and unsuspecting; but behind these fair clouds I seemed to hear the muttering of the thunder, and I dreaded the moment when my master’s suspicions should be aroused.

“As my lady’s time to become a mother drew near, many of the guests took their departure; but M. Gabriel remained. He and Mr. Almer were the closest friends, and they would talk with the greatest animation about pictures and books. M. Gabriel was very clever; the rapidity with which he would paint used to surprise us; his sketches were beautiful, and were hung everywhere about the house. Everybody sang his praises. He had a very sweet voice, he was a fine musician, there was not a subject he was not ready to converse upon. If it came to deep scholarship and learning I have no doubt that Mr. Almer held the first place, but my master was never eager, as M. Gabriel was, to display his gifts, and to show off his brilliant qualities in society. Certainly he could not win ladies’ hearts as easily as M. Gabriel. These things are in the nature of a man, and one will play for the mere pleasure of winning, while another does not consider it

worth his while to try. Of two such men I know which is the better and more deserving of love.

“Rapid worker as M. Gabriel was with his paintings and sketches, my lady’s portrait hung upon his hands; he did not seem to be able to satisfy himself, and he was continually making alterations. When Master Christian was born, his mother’s picture was still unfinished in M. Gabriel’s studio.

CHAPTER VI

THE GRAVE OF HONOUR

“THE birth of the heir was now the most important event; everything gave way to it. Congratulations poured in from all quarters, and it really seemed as if a better era had dawned. I believe I was the only one who mistrusted appearances; I should have been easier in my mind had M. Gabriel left the villa. But he remained, and as long as he and my lady were near each other I knew that the storm-clouds were not far off.

“In a few weeks my lady got about again; she was never strong, and now she was so delicate and weak that the doctors would not allow her to nurse her child. I was very sorry for this; had her baby drawn life from her breast it might have diverted her attention from M. Gabriel.

“It is hard to believe that so joyful an event as the birth of her first child should not have softened her heart towards her husband. It is the truth, however; they were no nearer to each other than they had been before. Mr. Almer was not to blame; he did all in his power to win his wife to more affectionate ways, but he might as well have hoped for a miracle as to hope to win a love that was given to another.

“The child thrived, and it was not till he was a year old that the portrait of his mother was finished—the picture that is hanging on the wall before me. It was greatly admired, and my master set great store upon it.

“‘It is in every way your finest work,’ he said to M.

Gabriel. 'Were it not that I object to my wife's beauty being made a subject of criticism, I should persuade you to exhibit the portrait.'

"Not long afterwards, M. Gabriel was called away. I thanked God for it. The danger I feared was removed; but he returned in the course of a few weeks, and began to paint again in the summer-house. While he was absent my lady fell into her former habits of listlessness; when he returned she became animated and joyous. Truly he was to her as the sun is to the flower. This change in her mood, from sadness to gaiety, was so sudden that it frightened me, for I felt that Mr. Almer must be the blindest of the blind if it did not force itself upon his attention. It did not escape his notice; I saw that, from a certain alteration in his manner toward his wife and his friend. It was not that he was colder or less friendly; but when he looked at them he seemed to be pondering upon something which perplexed him. He said nothing to them, however, to express disapproval of their intimacy. He was not an impulsive man, and I never knew him to commit himself to an important act without deliberation.

"In the midst of his perplexity the storm burst. I was an accidental witness of the occurrence which led to the tragic events of which I have yet to speak.

"There was at this time among our guests an old dowager, who did nothing but tittle-tattle from morning till night about her friends and acquaintances, and who seemed to be always hunting for an opportunity to make ill-natured remarks. A piece of scandal was a great delight to her. Heaven save me from ever meeting with another such a lady.

"I was in one of the wooded walks at some distance from the house, gathering balsam for a fellow-servant whose hand had been wounded, when the voice of this old dowager reached my ears. She was speaking to a lady companion, and I should not have stopped to listen had not Mrs. Almer's name been mentioned in a tone which set my blood tingling.

"'It is scandalous, my dear,' the old dowager was saying, 'the way she goes on with M. Gabriel. Of course, I

wouldn't mention it to another soul in the world but you, for it is not my affair. Not that it is not natural, for she is young, and he is young, and Mr. Almer is old enough to be their father; but they really should be more discreet. I can't make up my mind whether Mr. Almer sees it, and considers it best to take no notice, or whether he is really blind to what is going on. Anyway, that does not alter the affair, so far as his wife and M. Gabriel are concerned. Such looks at each other, my dear!—such pressing of hands!—such sighs! One can almost hear them. It is easy to see they are in love with each other.'

"And a great deal more to the same effect until they walked away from the spot and were out of hearing.

"I was all of a tremble, and I was worrying myself as to what it was best to do when I heard another step close to me.

"It was my master, who must also have been within hearing. His face was stern and white, and there was blood on his lips as though he had bitten them through.

"He walked my way and saw me.

"'How long have you been here, Denise?' he asked.

"I could not tell him a falsehood, and I had not the courage to answer him.

"'It is enough,' he said; 'you have heard what I have heard. Not to a living being must a word of what you have heard pass your lips. I have always believed that you had a regard for the honour of my house and name, and it is for that reason I have placed confidence in you. I shall continue to trust you until you give me cause to doubt your good faith. Hasten after that lady and her companion who have been conversing here, and ask them to favour me with an interview. While I speak to them, remain out of hearing.'

"I obeyed him in silence, and conducted the ladies to my master's presence. I am in ignorance of what he said to them, but that evening an excuse was made for their sudden departure from the villa. They left, and did not appear again.

"Grateful as I was at the removal of this source of danger, I soon saw that the time I dreaded had arrived.

My master was in doubt whether his wife was faithful to him.

“A more cruel suspicion never entered the mind of man, and as false as it was cruel. Mrs. Almer was a pure woman; basely wronged as she had been, she was a virtuous wife. As I hope for salvation this is my firm belief.

“But how can I blame my master? Smarting with a grief which had sucked all the light out of his days, which had poisoned his life and his hopes, trusting as he had trusted, deceived as he had been deceived, with every offer of love refused and despised, and with, as he believed, dishonour staring him in the face—he might well be pardoned for the doubt which now took possession of him.

“He planned out a course, and steadily followed it. Without betraying himself, he watched his wife and his friend, and he could not fail to see that the feelings they entertained for each other were stronger than the ordinary feelings of friendship which may properly be allowed between a man and a woman. I know, also, that he discovered that my lady, before she married him, had accepted M. Gabriel as her lover. This in itself was sufficient for him.

“Under such circumstances it was, in his opinion, a sin for any woman to plight her faith and duty to another. To my master the words used at the altar were, in the meaning they conveyed, most sacred, solemn and binding. For a woman to utter them, with the image of another man in her heart, was a fearful and unpardonable crime.

“These perjuries are common enough, I believe, in the great world which moves at a distance from this quiet spot, but that they are common does not excuse them. Mr. Almer had strict and stern views of the duties of life, and roused as he was roused, he carried them out with cruel effect.

“Gradually he got rid of all his guests, with the exception of M. Gabriel; and then, one fatal morning, he surprised my lady and M. Gabriel as they sat together in the summer-house. There was no guilt between them; they were conversing innocently enough, but my lady was in

tears, and M. Gabriel was endeavouring to console her. Sufficient, certainly, to work a husband into a furious state.

"None of us knew what passed or what words were spoken; something terrible must have been uttered, for my lady, with a face like the face of death, tottered from the summer-house to this very room, where she lay in a fainting condition for hours. Her husband did not come near her, nor did he make any inquiries after her, but in the course of an hour he gave me instructions to have every sketch and painting made by M. Gabriel taken from the walls of the villa, and conveyed to the summer-house. I obeyed him, and all were removed except this portrait of my lady; it seemed to me that I ought not to allow it to be touched without her permission, and she was not in a fit condition to be disturbed.

"While this work was being accomplished no servant but myself was allowed to enter the studio. Two strange men carried the pictures into the summer-house, and these men, who had paint-pots and brushes with them, remained with Mr. Almer the whole of the afternoon.

"Dinner was served, but no one sat down to it. My lady was in her chamber, her husband was still in the summer-house, and M. Gabriel was wandering restlessly about. In the evening he addressed me.

" 'Where is Mr. Almer?' he asked.

" 'In the summer-house,' I replied.

" 'Go to him,' he said, 'and say I desire to have a few words with him.'

"In a few minutes they confronted each other on the steps which led to the studio.

" 'Enter,' said my master; 'you also, Denise, so that you may hear what I have to say to M. Gabriel, and what he has to say to me.'

"I entered with them, and could scarcely believe my eyes. The walls of the studio had been painted a deep black. Not only the walls, but the woodwork of the windows which gave light to the room. The place resembled a tomb.

"M. Gabriel's face was like the face of a corpse as he gazed around.

“ ‘This is your doing,’ he said to my master, pointing to the black walls.

“ ‘Pardon me,’ said my master; ‘it is none of my work. *You* are the artist here, and this is the picture you have painted on my heart and life. Denise, are all M. Gabriel’s sketches and paintings in this studio?’

“ ‘They are all here, sir,’ I replied.

“ There was a sense of guilt at my heart, for I thought of my lady’s portrait. Fortunately for me my master did not refer to it.

“ ‘M. Gabriel,’ said my master to the artist, ‘these paintings are your property, and are at your disposal for one week from this day. Within that time remove them from my house. You will have no other opportunity. At the end of the week this summer-house will be securely locked and fastened, and thereafter, during my lifetime, no person will be allowed to enter it. For yourself a carriage is now waiting for you at the gates. I cannot permit you to sleep another night under my roof.’

“ ‘I had no intention of doing so,’ said M. Gabriel, ‘nor should I have remained here so long had it not been that I was determined not to leave without an interview with you.’

“ ‘What do you require of me?’

“ ‘Satisfaction.’

“ ‘Satisfaction!’ exclaimed my master, with a scornful smile. ‘Is it not I rather should demand it?’

“ ‘Demand it, then,’ cried M. Gabriel. ‘I am ready to give it to you.’

“ ‘I am afraid,’ said my master coldly, ‘that it is out of your power to afford me satisfaction. Were you a man of honour events might take a different course. It is only lately that I have seen you in your true colours; to afford you the satisfaction you demand would be, on my part, an admission that you are my equal. You are not; you are the basest of cowards. Depart at once, and do not compel me to call my servants to force you from my gates.’

“ ‘Endeavour to evade me,’ said M. Gabriel, as he walked to the door, ‘in every way you can, you shall not escape the consequences of your conduct.’

"He carried it with a high hand, this fine gentleman who had brought misery into this house; had I been a man I should have had a difficulty in preventing myself from striking him.

"When he was gone my master said:

" 'You are at liberty to repeat to your lady what has passed between me and M. Gabriel.'

"I did not repeat it: there was such a dreadful significance in the black walls, and in my master's words, that that was the picture M. Gabriel had painted on his heart and life, that I could not be so cruel to my lady as to tell her what had passed between the two gentlemen who held her fate in their hands.

"But she herself, on the following day, questioned me:

" 'You were present yesterday,' she said, 'at an interview between M. Gabriel and my husband?'

" 'Yes, my lady,' I answered.

" 'Did they meet in anger, Denise?'

" 'M. Gabriel was angry, my lady,' I said.

" 'And my husband?' she asked.

" 'Appeared to be suffering, my lady.'

" 'Did they part in anger?'

" 'On M. Gabriel's side, my lady, yes.'

" 'Is M. Gabriel in the villa?'

" 'No, my lady. He departed last night.'

" 'Of his own accord?'

" 'My master bade him go, and M. Gabriel said he intended to leave without being bidden.'

" 'It could not be otherwise. My husband is here?'

" 'Yes, my lady.'

"That was all that was said on that day. The next day my lady asked me again if her husband was in the villa and I answered 'Yes.' The next day she asked me the same question, and I gave the same reply. The fourth day and the fifth she repeated the question, and my reply that my master had not been outside the gates afforded her relief. The fear in her mind was that my master and M. Gabriel would fight a duel, and that one would be killed.

"During these days my lady did not leave her chamber, nor did her husband visit her.

"From the window of this room the summer-house can be seen, and my lady for an hour or two each day sat at the window, gazing vacantly out.

"On the evening of the fifth day my lady said:

" 'Denise, there have been workmen busily engaged about the summer-house. What are they doing?'

"I bore in mind my master's remark to me that I was at liberty to repeat to my lady what had been said by him and M. Gabriel in their last interview. It was evident that he wished her to be made acquainted with it, and it was my duty to be faithful to him as well as to my lady. I informed her of my master's resolve to fasten the doors of the summer-house and never to allow them to be opened during his lifetime.

" 'There are only two more days,' she said, 'to-morrow and the next.'

"I prayed silently that she would not take the fancy in her head to visit the summer-house before it was fastened up, knowing the shock that the sight of the black walls would cause her.

"The next day she did not refer to the subject, but the next, which was the last, she sat at the window watching the workmen bring their tools and bars and bolts to complete the work for which they had been engaged.

" 'Come with me, Denise,' she said. 'A voice whispers to me that there is something concealed in the summer-house which I must see before it is too late.'

" 'My lady,' I said, trembling, 'I would not go if I were in your place.'

"I could not have chosen worse words.

" 'You would not go if you were in my place!' she repeated. 'Then there is something concealed there which it is necessary for me to see. Unless,' she added, looking at me for an answer, 'my husband prohibits it.'

" 'He has not prohibited it, my lady.'

" 'And yet you would not go if you were in my place! Cannot you see that I should be false to myself if I allowed that place to be sealed forever against me, before making myself acquainted with something that has taken place therein? You need not accompany me, Denise, unless you choose.'

“ ‘I will go with you, my lady,’ I said, and we went out of the villa together.

“ We entered the summer-house, my lady first, I a few steps behind her.

She placed her hands upon her eyes and shuddered, the moment she saw the black walls. She understood what was meant by this sign.

“ But there was more to come, of which, up to that day, I had been ignorant. On one of the walls was painted in white, the words,

“ ‘THE GRAVE OF HONOUR.’

“ It was like an inscription on a tomb.

“ When my lady opened her eyes they fell upon these cruel words. For many minutes she stood in silence, with eyes fixed on the wall, and then she turned towards me, and by a motion of her hand, ordered me to leave the place with her. Never, never, had I seen such an expression of anguish on a face as rested on hers. It was as though her own heart, her own good name, her own honour, were lying dead in that room! There are deeds which can never be atoned for. This deed of my master’s was one.

CHAPTER VII

HUSBAND AND WIFE

“ **R**EMAIN with me, Denise,’ said my lady, as we walked back to the house. ‘I am weak, and may need you.’

“ Then, for the first time, I noticed what gave me hope. She took her baby boy in her arms, and pressed him passionately to her bosom, murmuring:

“ ‘I have only you—I have only you!’

“ It was not that hitherto she had been wanting in tenderness, but that in my presence she had never so yearningly displayed it. It gladdened me also to think that her child was a comfort to her in this grave crisis.

“ But the hope I indulged in was doomed to disappoint-

ment. In the evening my lady bade me ascertain whether her husband was in the villa.

"I went to him, and made the inquiry.

" 'Tell my wife,' he said, in a gentle tone, 'that I am ready to wait upon her whenever she desires it.'

"It was late in the night when my lady called me to assist her to dress. I did so, wondering at the strange proceeding. She chose her prettiest dress, one which she had worn in her maiden days. She wore no ornaments, or flowers or ribbons of any colour. Simply a white dress, with white lace for her head and shoulders.

" 'Now go to your master,' she said, 'and say I desire to see him.'

"I gave him the message, and he accompanied me to this room, where my lady was waiting to receive him, with as much ceremony as if he had been a stranger guest.

"I am here at your bidding,' he said, and turning to me, 'You can go, Denise.'

" 'You will stay, Denise,' said my lady.

"The manner of both was stern, but there was more decision in my lady's voice than in his. I hesitated, not knowing which of them to obey.

" 'Stay, then, Denise,' said my master, 'as your mistress desires it.'

"I retreated to a corner of the room, as far away from them as I could get. I was really afraid of what was coming. Within the hearts of husband and wife a storm was raging, all the more terrible because of the outward calm with which they confronted each other.

" 'You know,' said my lady, 'for what reason I desired to see you.'

" 'I know,' he replied, 'that I expected you would send for me. If you had not, I should not have presented myself.'

" 'You have in your mind,' she said, 'matters which concern us both, of which it is necessary you should speak.'

" 'It is more than necessary—it is imperative that I should speak of the matters you refer to.'

" 'The opportunity is yours. I also have something to say when you have finished. The sooner our minds are unburdened the better it will be—for you and me.'

“ ‘It were preferable,’ he added, ‘that what we say to each other should be said without witnesses. Consider whether it will not be best that Denise should retire.’

“ ‘There is no best or worst for me,’ she rejoined; ‘my course is decided, and no arguments of yours can alter it. Denise will remain, as I bade her, and what you have to say must be spoken in her presence.’

“ ‘Be it so. Denise is the most trusted servant of my house; I have every confidence in her. Otherwise, I should insist upon her leaving the room.’

“ ‘It is right,’ said my lady, ‘that you should be made acquainted with a resolution I have come to within the last few hours. After this night I will never open my lips to you, nor, willingly, will I ever listen to your voice. I swear most solemnly that I am in earnest—as truly in earnest as if I were on my death-bed!’

“ I shuddered; her voice and manner carried conviction with them. My master turned to me, and said:

“ ‘What you hear must never pass your lips while your mistress and I are alive.’

“ ‘It never shall,’ I said, shaking like a leaf.

“ ‘When we are dead, Denise, you can please yourself.’ He stood again face to face with his wife. ‘Madame, it is necessary that I should recall the past. When I spoke to your lady mother on the subject of my love for you—being encouraged and in a measure urged to do so by herself—I was frank and open with her. There was nothing in my life which I concealed, which I had occasion to conceal. I had grave doubts as to the suitability of a marriage with you, doubts which did not place you at a disadvantage. I had not the grace of youth to recommend me; there was a serious difference in our ages; my habits of life were staid and serious. You were fit to be the wife of a prince; your youth, your beauty, your accomplishments, entitled you to more than I could offer—which was simply a life of ease and the homage of a faithful heart. Only in one respect were we equal—in respect of birth. Had I not been encouraged by your mother, I should not have had the temerity to give expression to my feelings; but I spoke, and for me there was no retreating. I begged your lady mother not to encourage me with false hopes,

but to be as frank with me as I was with her. Of the doubts which disturbed me, one was paramount. You had moved in the world—you had been idolised in society—and it scarcely seemed possible that your heart could be disengaged. In that case, I informed your lady mother that no earthly consideration could induce me to step between you and your affections; nay, with all the force which earnestness could convey, I offered to do all in my power—if it were possible that my services could avail—to aid in bringing your life to its happiest pass. At such a moment as this, a solemn one, madame, which shall never be forgotten by you or by me, I may throw aside false delicacy, and may explain the meaning of these last words to your mother. Having had in my hands the settlement of your father's affairs, I knew that you were poor, and my meaning was, that if any money of mine could assist in bringing about a union between you and the object of your affections—did any such exist—it was ready, cheerfully offered and cheerfully given for such a purpose. I made but one stipulation in the matter—that it should never, directly or indirectly, be brought to your knowledge.'

"He paused, in the expectation that his wife would speak, and she said coldly:

"'You are doubtless stating the truth.'

"'The simple truth, madame, neither more nor less; and believe it or not, as you will, it was your welfare, not mine, that was uppermost in my mind. Your lady mother assured me that before you came to the villa your heart was entirely free, but that since you honoured me by becoming my guest, you had fixed your affections upon myself. My astonishment was great; I could scarcely believe the evidence of my senses. I entreated your lady mother not to mislead me, and she proved to me—to me, to whom the workings of a woman's heart were as a sealed book—in a hundred different ways, which she said I might have discovered for myself—if I had had the wit—that you most truly loved me. She professed to be honoured by my proposal, which she accepted for you, and which she said you would joyfully accept for yourself. But she warned me not to be disappointed in the manner in which

you would receive me; that your pride and shame might impel you to appear reluctant instead of joyful, and that it behoved me, as a wise man—Heaven help me!—to put a right and sensible construction on the natural maidenly reserve of a young girl. The rest you know. The wise man, madame, has been sadly at fault; it has been fatally proved to him that he knows little of the workings of the human heart.'

"She held up her hand as a sign that she wished to speak, and he paused. A little thing struck me at the time, which has never passed out of my mind. She held up her hand in front of the lamp, and the light shone through the thin, delicate fingers. Seldom do I think of my lady without seeing that slight, beautiful hand, with the pink light shining through it.

" 'My mother,' she said, 'did not speak the truth. M. Gabriel and I were affianced before I became your guest.'

" 'Your information comes too late,' said my master; 'you should have told me so much when I offered you my name. It would have been sufficient. I should not have forced myself upon you, and shame and sin would have been avoided.'

" 'There has been no sin,' said my lady, 'and who links me with shame brings shame upon himself. I have been wronged beyond the hope of reparation in this life. Before you spoke to me of marriage I wrote to M. Gabriel frequently from this villa. My letters were intercepted——'

"He interrupted her. 'To my knowledge no letters were intercepted; I had no suspicion of such a proceeding.'

"I do not say you had; I am making you acquainted with a fact. Hurt and vexed at receiving no reply to my letters, and being able to account for it only on the supposition that they had not come into his possession, I wrote one and gave it to Denise to post for me. That also, as I learnt after my mother's death, was intercepted, and never reached its destination. In the meantime, false information was given to me respecting M. Gabriel; shameful stories were related to me, in which he was the

principal actor. He was vile and false, as I was led to believe; and you were held up to me as his very opposite, as noble, chivalrous, generous, disinterested——'

" 'In all of which you will bear in mind, I was in no way inculpated, being entirely ignorant of what was going on under my roof.'

" 'And I was, besides, led to believe by my mother that you had laid us under such obligations that there was but one repayment of them——'

" 'Plainly speaking,' he interposed, 'that, in any kindness I had shown, I was deliberately making a purchase, that in every friendly office I performed, I had but one cowardly end in view. It needed this to complete the story.'

" 'My heart was almost broken,' she continued, making no comment on his bitter interruption; 'but it was pointed out to me that I could at least answer the call of gratitude and duty. Doubly did my mother deceive me.'

" 'And doubly,' said my master, 'did you deceive me.'

" 'When, some time after our unhappy marriage, you introduced M. Gabriel into this house, I was both angry and humiliated. It looked as though you intended to insult me, and Denise was a witness of my agitation. It was not unnatural that, remaining here, your guest—bidden by you, not by me—for so long a time explanations should pass between M. Gabriel and myself. Then it was that my eyes were really opened to the pit into which I had been deliberately dragged.'

" 'Not by me were you dragged into this pit.'

" 'Let it pass for a moment,' she said, in a disdainful voice. 'When my eyes were opened to the truth, how was I to know that you had not shared in the plot against me? How am I to know it now?'

" 'By my denial. Doubt me if you will, and believe that I tricked to obtain you. I shall not attempt to undeceive you. No good purpose would be served by a successful endeavour to soften your feelings towards me; I do not, indeed, desire that they should be softened, for no link of love can ever unite us. It never did, and never can, and I am not a man to live upon shams. If I tricked to obtain you, you will not deny that I have my reward—

a rich reward, the rank fruit of which will cling to me and abide with me till the last moment of my life.'

" 'I went into the summer-house this afternoon,' she said.

" 'I know it.'

" 'It was your intention that I should visit it.'

" 'It was not exactly my intention; I left it to chance.'

" 'You have made it a memorial of shame, of a cruel declaration against me!'

" 'I have made it a memorial of my own deep unhappiness. That studio will never again be opened during your life and mine. Madame, in all that you have said—and I have followed you attentively—you have not succeeded in making me believe that I have anything to reproach myself for. My blindness was deplorable, but it is not a reproach. My actions were distinguished at least by absolute candour and frankness. Can you assert the same? You loved M. Gabriel before you met me—was I to blame for that? You were made to believe he was false to you—was I to blame for that? You revenged yourself upon him by accepting my hand, and I, unversed in woman's ways, believed that no pure-minded woman would marry a man unless she loved him. I still believe so. When we stood before the altar, I was happy in the belief that your heart was mine; and certainly from that moment, your faith, your honour, were pledged to me, as mine was pledged to you. M. Gabriel was my friend. I was a man when he was a boy, and I became interested in him, and assisted him in his career. We had not met for years; he knew that I had married——'

" 'But he did not know,' interrupted my lady, 'that you had married *me*!'

" 'Granted. Was I to blame for that? After our marriage you fell into melancholy moods, which I at first ascribed to the tragic fate of your parents. Most sincerely did I sympathise with you. Day after day, night after night, did I ponder and consider how I could bring the smile to your lips, how I could gladden your young heart. Reflect upon this, madame, in the days that are before you, and reflect upon the manner in which you received my attentions. At one time, when I had invited to

the villa a number of joyous spirits in the hope that their liveliness and gaiety would have a beneficial effect upon you, I received a letter from M. Gabriel with reference to a picture he was painting. I invited him here, and he came. What was his duty, what was yours, when you and he met in my presence, when I introduced you to each other, for the first time as I thought? Madame, if not before him, at least before you, there was but one honest course. Did you pursue it? No; you received M. Gabriel as a stranger, and you permitted me to rest in the belief that until that day you had been unconscious of his existence. Without referring to my previous sufferings—which, madame, were very great—in what position did I, the husband, stand in relation to my wife and friend, who, in that moment of introduction, tacitly conspired against my honour, and who, after explanations had passed between them, met and conversed as lovers? Their guilt was the more heinous because of its secrecy—and utterly, utterly unpardonable because of their treachery towards him who trusted in them both. A double betrayal! But at length the husband's suspicions were aroused. In a conversation which he accidentally overheard between two ladies who were visiting him—the name of his wife—your name, madame—was mentioned in connection with that of M. Gabriel; and from their conversation he learnt that their too friendly intimacy had become a subject for common talk. Jealous of his honour, and of his name, upon which there had hitherto been no blot, he silenced the scandal-mongers; but from that day he more carefully observed his wife and his friend, until the truth was revealed. Then came retribution, and a black chapter in the lives of three human beings was closed—though the book itself is not yet completed.'

"He paused, a long time as it seemed to me, before he spoke again. The silence was awful, and in the faces of the husband and the wife there were no signs of relenting. They bore themselves as two persons might have done who had inflicted upon each other a mortal wrong for which there was no earthly forgiveness. From my heart I pitied them both.

CHAPTER VIII

THE COMPACT

“‘**Y**OU sent for me, madame,’ he said presently, ‘because it was necessary that some explanation should be given of the occurrences that have taken place in my family, of which you are a member. Each of us has reason to regret an alliance which has caused us so much suffering. Unfortunately for our happiness and our peace of mind the truth has been spoken too late; but it were idle now to waste time in lamentations. There are in life certain bitter trials which must be accepted; in that light I accept the calamity which has fallen upon us, and which, had I known before our marriage what I know now, would most surely have been averted. It was in your power to avert it; you did not do so, but led me blindly into the whirlpool. You have informed me that, after this night, you will never open your lips to me, nor ever again listen to my voice.’

“‘Nor will I,’ she said, ‘from the rising of to-morrow’s sun.’

“‘I shall do nothing to woo you from that resolve. But you bear my name, and to some extent my honour is still in your keeping.’

“‘Have you, then,’ she asked, ‘any commands to give me?’

“‘It will depend,’ he replied, ‘upon what I hear from you. So far as my honour is concerned I intend to exercise control over you; no farther.’

“‘Your honour is safe with me, as it has always been.’

“‘I will not debate the point with you. You say that you have decided on your course, and that no arguments of mine will turn you from it.’

“‘Yes; my course is decided. Am I free to go from your house?’

“‘You are not free to go. Only one thing shall part us—death!’

“ ‘We have a child,’ she said, and her voice, for that moment, insensibly softened.

“ ‘Is he asleep?’

“ ‘Yes.’

“He went into the inner room, and remained there for several minutes, and my lady, with a white and tearless face, waited for his return.

“I thought I heard the sound of kisses in the bedroom, but I could not be sure. There was, however, a tender light in my master’s eyes when he came back, a light which showed that his heart was touched.

“ ‘Our child shall remain with you,’ he said to my lady, ‘if you wish.’

“ ‘I do wish it,’ she said.

“ ‘I will not take him from you, only that I must sometimes see him.’

“ ‘He shall be brought to you every day.’

“ ‘I am content. Let him grow up to love me or hate me, as the prompting of his nature and your teaching shall direct. From my lips he shall never hear a disparaging word of his mother.’

“ ‘Nor shall he, from my lips, of his father.’

“He bowed to her as he would have bowed to a princess, and said:

“ ‘I thank you. But little, then, remains to be said. We are bound to each other irrevocably, and we cannot part without disgrace. We have brought our griefs upon ourselves, and we must bear them in silence. The currents of my life are changed, and these gates shall never again be opened to friends. I have done with friendship as I have done with love. I ask you what course you have determined upon?’

“ ‘I propose,’ said my lady, ‘to make these rooms my home, if you will give them to me to live in.’

“ ‘They are yours,’ he replied. ‘Unless I am compelled by duty, or by circumstances which I do not at present foresee, I will never enter them during your lifetime.’

“ ‘It is as I would have it,’ she said. ‘In daylight I shall not leave them. If I walk in the grounds it shall be at nightfall. Outside your gates I will never more be

seen, nor will I allow a friend or an acquaintance to visit me. Will you allow Denise to wait upon me?’

“‘She is your servant, and yours only, from this moment. I am pleased that you have selected her.’

“‘Denise,’ said my lady to me, ‘are you willing to serve me?’

“‘Yes, my lady,’ I answered. I was almost choked with sobs, while they were outwardly calm and unmoved.

“‘Then there is nothing more to be said—except farewell.’ And my lady looked towards the door.

“He did not linger a moment. He bowed to her ceremoniously, and left the room.

“When he was gone I felt as if some sudden and fearful shock must surely take place, as if a thunderbolt would fall and destroy us, or as if my lady would fall dead at my feet, the silence that ensued was so unearthly. But nothing occurred, and when I had courage to look up I saw my lady sitting in a chair, white and still, with a resigned and determined expression on her face. It would have been a great relief to me if she had cried, but there was not a tear in her eyes.

“‘Do you believe me guilty, Denise?’ she asked.

“‘The saints forbid,’ I cried, ‘that such a wicked thought should enter my mind! I know you to be an innocent, suffering lady.’

“‘You will do as you have been bidden to do, Denise. While my husband and I are living you will not speak of what has passed within this room.’

“‘I will not, my lady.’

“And never again was the subject referred to by either of us. She did not make the slightest allusion to it, and I did not dare to do so.

CHAPTER IX

MOTHER DENISE HAS STRANGE FANCIES IN THE NIGHT

“**A** NEW life now commenced for us—a new and dreadful life. Mr. Almer gave orders that no person was to be admitted to the villa without his express permission. He denied himself to every chance visitor, and from that time until you came, my lady, no friend of the family, except a great banker, and occasionally Master Pierre Lamont, both of whom came upon business, ever entered the gates. The doctor, of course, when he was needed; but no one else.

“Mr. Almer passed most of his time in his study, writing and reading, and pacing to and fro as he used to do in times gone by. He did not make any enquiries about my lady, nor did she about him. She lived in these rooms, and, in my remembrance, did not stir out of them during the day. Master Christian slept in the inner room there, and was free to roam about as he pleased.

“Every morning I took the child to his father, who sometimes would kiss him and send him back to my lady, and sometimes would say:

“‘You can leave him with me, Denise, for an hour.’

“Then he would take the child into the study, and lock the door, and nurse and sing to him. I was in the habit of seeing him thus engaged as I walked backwards and forwards in the grounds in front of the study, waiting for his summons to carry master Christian to his mother.

“His was not a happy childhood, for when he began to speak and think, the estrangement between his parents puzzled him deeply, and made him sad. He was continually asking questions to which he received replies which perplexed him more and more. With childlike, innocent cunning he strove to draw them to each other. When he was with my lady, it was:

“‘Mamma, why do you not go and speak to papa?’

There he is walking in the garden. Come out with me, mamma—come quickly, or papa will be gone.’

“And when he was with his father he would say:

“‘Papa, I have a message for you.’

“‘Yes, Christian,’ my master would say.

“‘You are to take hold of my hand, and come with me immediately to mamma. Yes, papa, indeed, immediately! She wants to speak to you.’

“Mr. Almer knew that this was nothing but invention on the child’s part.

“What they learnt of each other’s health and doings came through Master Christian; it is very hard, my lady, to stop a child’s innocent prattle.

“‘Papa, I wish to tell you something.’

“‘Tell me, Christian.’

“‘Mamma has a bad headache—such a bad, bad headache! I have been smoothing her forehead with my hand, but it will not go away for me. You cured my headache last week; come and cure mamma.’

“And at another time:

“‘Papa, is not this beautiful?’

“‘Yes, Christian, it is very pretty.’

“‘Mamma painted it for me. Do you know, papa, she has painted me—yes, my portrait, and has put it in a book. It is exactly like—you could not tell it from me myself. Shall I ask her to give it to you—or will you come and ask for it yourself?’

“With my lady it was the same.

“‘Mamma, papa has been writing all day long. I peeped through the window, and he looked so tired—just as you look sometimes. Now, mamma, tell me—do you think papa is happy?’

“‘Mamma, see what papa has given me—a musical-box! Only because I said to him I should like a musical-box! Is he not good?’

“And so it went on day after day, week after week, but the child’s eager, anxious love brought them no nearer to each other.

“In the dark nights when the weather permitted, my lady walked in the grounds. At first I offered to accompany her, but she refused my company.

“ ‘I will walk alone, Denise.’

“The servants used to say, as the moonlight fell on her white dress:

“ ‘She looks like a white ghost.’

“And at other times:

“ ‘She is like a white shadow moving in the moon’s light.’

“Her husband was careful to keep out of her sight when she indulged in these lonely rambles. They would not make the slightest advance to each other.

“I must not forget to tell you what occurred about a month after this estrangement. The duties of my attendance on my lady did not keep me with her during the night unless she was ill, and was likely to require my services. Generally I waited till I saw her abed and asleep. She retired early, and this afforded me an opportunity of looking after the room occupied by my husband and myself.

“I remember that on this night I drew the blind aside after I was undressed, and looked toward my master’s study. There were lights in the windows, as usual. I was not surprised, for Mr. Almer frequently sat up the whole night through.

“I went to bed, and soon fell asleep.

“Quite contrary to my usual habit, I woke up while it was dark, and heard the sound of the clock striking the hour. I counted the strokes, from one to twelve. It was midnight.

“I was such a good sleeper—seldom waking till the morning, when it was time to get up—that I wondered to myself what it was that awoke me. The striking of the clock? Hardly—for that was no new sound. What, then? Gusts of wind were sweeping round the walls of the villa. ‘Ah,’ I thought, ‘it was the wind that disturbed me;’ and I settled myself for sleep again, when suddenly another sound—an unusual one this time—made me jump up in bed. The sound was like that of a heavy object jumping, or falling, from a height within the grounds.

“ ‘Can it be robbers,’ I thought, ‘who have climbed the gates, and missed their footing?’

"The thought alarmed me, and I woke my husband, and told him what I had heard. He rose, and looked out of the window.

" 'Mr. Almer is up and awake,' said he. 'If there were any cause for alarm he would not be sitting quietly in his study, poring over his books. What you heard is the wind. Robbers, indeed! I pity the thief who tries to pass our dogs; he would be torn to pieces. There! let me get to sleep, and don't disturb me again with your foolish fancies; and get to sleep yourself as quick as you can. Now your head is stirring, you'll be imagining all sorts of things.'

"That was all the satisfaction I could get out of him; the next moment he was fast asleep again.

"It was no easy thing for me to follow his example. I lay thinking and thinking for an hour or more. I was glad my husband had mentioned the dogs; in my alarm I had forgotten them. Martin was quite right. Any stranger who attempted to pass them would have been torn to pieces.

"Well, but there *was* somebody walking on the gravel-paths! I heard soft footsteps crunching the stones, stepping cautiously, as though fearful of disturbing the people in the house. These sounds came to my ears between the gusts of wind, which were growing stronger and stronger.

"I was on the point of rousing my husband again when it occurred to me that it might be my master, who, restless as usual, was walking about the grounds.

"This explanation quieted me, and I was soon asleep. For how long I cannot say, for suddenly I found myself sitting up in bed, wide awake, listening to the wind, which was shaking the house to its foundations. And yet the impression was so strong upon me that it was not the storm that had frightened me, that I went to the window and looked out, expecting to see Heaven only knows what. Nothing was to be seen, and presently I reasoned myself out of my fears, and was not again disturbed during the night.

"In the morning a strange discovery was made. A servant came running to me before I was dressed, with the information that our two dogs were dead. I hurried

to the kennel and saw their bodies stretched out, cold and stiff.

"Mr. Almer was very fond of these dogs, and I went to him and told him what had occurred. There was a strange, wild look in his eyes which I attributed to want of sleep. But stranger than this weary, wild expression was the smile on his lips when he heard the news.

"He followed me to the kennel, and stooped down.

"'They are quite dead, Denise,' he said.

"'Yes, sir,' I said, 'but who could have done such a cruel thing?'

"'The dogs have been poisoned,' he said, 'here is the meat that was thrown to them. There is still some white powder upon it.'

"'Poisoned!' I cried. 'The wretches.'

"'Whoever did this deed,' said my master, 'deserved to die. It is as bad as killing a human creature in cold blood.'

"'Are you sure, sir,' I said, 'there has been nothing stolen from the house?'

"'You can go and see, Denise.'

"I made an examination of the rooms. Nothing had been taken from them. I tried the door of my master's study to examine that room also, but it was locked. When I returned my master was still kneeling by the dogs.

"'It does not appear that anything has been taken,' I said, 'but the sounds I heard in the night prove that there have been robbers here.'

"'What sounds did you hear?' asked my master, looking up.

"I told him of my alarm, and of my waking my husband, and of my fancies.

"'Fancies!' he said; 'yes—it could have been nothing but imagination. I have been up the whole night, and had there been an attempt at robbery, I must surely have known it. Were any of the other servants disturbed?'

"'No, sir.'

"I had already questioned them, but they had all slept soundly and had heard nothing. I had been also with my lady for a few moments, but she had not been dis-

turbed during the night by anything but the howling of the wind.

“ ‘Let the matter rest,’ said my master; ‘it will be best. It is my wish that you do not speak of it. The dogs are dead, and nothing can restore them to life. Evil deeds carry their own punishment with them! The next time you are frightened by fancies in the night, and see a light in my study, you may be satisfied that all is well.’

“ So the dogs were buried, and no action was taken to punish their murderers; and in a little while the whole affair was forgotten.

CHAPTER X

CHRISTIAN ALMER'S CHILD-LIFE

“ **T**HE years went by in the lonely villa without any change, except that my lady grew into the habit of taking her walks in the grounds later in the night. Not a word was exchanged between her and her husband; had seas divided them they could not have been further apart from each other.

“ A dreadful, dreary monotony of days. The direction and control of the house was left entirely to me; my master took not the slightest interest in what was going on. I should have asked to be relieved from the service, had it not been for my affection for my mistress. To live with her—as I did for years, attending upon her daily—without loving her was not possible. Her gentleness, her resignation, her resolution, her patience, were almost beyond belief with those who were not constant witnesses of her lonely, blameless, suffering life.

“ She never wrote or received a letter. She severed herself entirely from the world, and these rooms were her living grave.

“ She loved her child, but she did not give way to any violent demonstration of feeling. I observed, as the lad grew up, that he became more and more perplexed by the relations which existed between his parents. Had one or the other been unkind to him, he might have been able to

put a reasonable construction upon the estrangement, but they were equally affectionate, equally tender towards him. He continued to exercise the prettiest cunning to bring them together, but without avail. Without avail, also, the entreaties he used.

" 'Mamma, the sun is shining beautifully. Do come out with me and speak to papa. Do, mamma, do! See, he is walking in the garden.'

" 'Mamma, may I bring papa into your room? Say yes. I am sure he would be glad.'

" 'Papa, mamma is really very ill. I do so wish you would see her and speak to her! There, papa, I have hold of your hand. Come, papa, come!'

" It was heart-breaking to hear the lad, who loved both, who received love from both.

" 'Mamma,' he said, 'are you rich?'

" 'In what way, dear child?' she asked, I have no doubt wondering at his question; 'in money? Do you mean that?'

" 'Yes, mamma, I mean that.'

" 'We are not in want of money, Christian.'

" 'Then you can buy whatever you want, mamma.'

" 'I want very little, Christian.'

" 'But if you wanted a great deal,' he persisted, 'you have money to pay for it?'

" 'Yes, Christian.'

" 'And papa, too?'

" 'Yes, and papa too.'

" 'I can't make it out,' he said. 'Yesterday, I saw a poor little girl crying. I asked her what she was crying for, and she said her mamma was in great trouble because they had no money. I asked her if money would make her mamma happy, and she said yes. Then why does it not make you happy?'

" 'Would you like some money, Christian,' said my lady, 'to give to this poor girl's mamma?'

" 'Yes, mamma.'

" Here is my purse. Denise will go with you at once.'

" We went to the cottage, and found that the family were in deep distress. The father was in arrears with

his rent, having been unable to work, through illness, for a good many weeks; he was now strong enough to return to his employment, but he was plunged into such difficulties that all his courage had deserted him. The mother was weak with overpowering anxiety, and the children were in want of food.

"I saw that the family were deserving of assistance, and I directed Master Christian what to give them. He visited them daily for a week and more, and the roses came back to the children's cheeks, and the hearts of the father and mother were filled with hope and gladness.

" 'Mamma,' said Master Christian, 'you have no idea how happy they are—and all because I gave them a little money. They play and sing together—yes, mamma, all of them; it is beautiful to see them. They call me their good angel.'

" 'I am very glad you have made them happy, my dear,' said my lady.

" 'Mamma, they are happy because they love each other, and because they laugh and sing together. Let me be your good angel, mamma, and papa's. Tell me what to do, so that we may live like those poor people!'

"These were hard things for parents to hear, and harder because no answers could be given to them.

"We went out for a stroll every fine day for an hour or so, and when Master Christian saw a child walking between father and mother, who smiled at each other and their little one, and spoke pleasantly and kindly one to the other, his eyes would fill with tears. He would peep through cottage windows—nay, he would go into the cottages, where he was always welcome, and would furnish himself with proofs of domestic happiness which never gladdened his heart in his own home. With scanty food, with ragged clothes, the common peasant children were enjoying what was denied to him.

"He had one especial friend, a delicate child, who at length was laid on a bed of sickness from which he never rose. Master Christian, for a few weeks before this child died, visited him daily in my company, and took the poor little fellow many comforting things, for which the humble family were very grateful. My young master would stand

by the bedside of the sick child, and witness, in silent pain, the evidences of paternal love which lightened the load of the little sufferer.

"The day before the child died we approached the cottage, and Master Christian peeped through the window. The child was dying, and by his bedside sat the sorrowing parents. The man's arm was round the woman's waist, and her head was resting on her husband's shoulder. We entered the cottage, and remained an hour, and as we walked home Master Christian said:

" 'If I were dying, would my mamma and papa sit like that?'

"I could find no words to answer this question, which showed what was passing in Master Christian's mind.

" 'Cannot you tell me,' said Master Christian, 'whether my rich parents would do for me what that little boy's poor parents are doing for him? It is so very much, Denise—so very, very much! It is more than money, for money is no use in Heaven, where he is going to. I wish my mamma and papa had been poor; then they would have lived together and have loved each other. Denise, tell me what it all means.'

" 'Hush, Master Christian,' I said, trying to soothe him, for his little bosom was swelling with grief. 'When you are a man you will understand.'

" 'I want to understand now—I want to understand now!' he cried. 'There is something very wicked about our house. I hate it—I hate it!'

"And he stamped his foot, and broke into a fit of sobbing so charged with sorrow that I could not help sobbing with him.

"Something of this must have reached his parents' ears, and how they suffered only themselves could have known. My master grew thin and wan; dark circles came round his eyes, and they often had a wild look in them which made me fear he was losing his senses. And my lady drooped and drooped, like a flower planted in unwholesome soil. Paler and quieter she grew every day; sweeter and more resigned, if that were possible, with every setting of the sun; so weak at last that she could not take her walk in the grounds.

"Sitting by the window, looking at the lovely sky, she said to me one peaceful evening:

" 'I shall soon be there, Denise.'

" 'Oh, my lady!' was all I could say.

" 'It rejoices me to think,' she said, 'that this long agony is coming to an end. I pray that the dear child I shall leave behind me will not suffer as I have suffered, that his life may be happy, and his end be peaceful. Denise, my mother is in that invisible spirit-land to which I am going. When she sees me coming, will she not be frightened to meet me? for, if it had not been for her, all this misery would have been averted.'

" 'My lady,' I said—so saint-like was her appearance that I could have knelt to her, 'let me go to my master and bring him to you.'

" 'He would not come,' she said, 'at your bidding, Denise. Has he not been often entreated by our child?'

" Believing that this was a sign of relenting on her part, I said:

" 'He knows that I dare not deceive him. He will come if I say you sent for him.'

" 'Perhaps, perhaps,' she said; 'but I would not have him come yet. When I summon him here he will not refuse me.'

" 'You will send for him one day, my lady?'

" 'Yes, Denise, unless I die suddenly in my sleep—an end I have often prayed for. But this great blessing may be denied to me.'

" Ah, how sad were the days! It fills me with grief, even now, to speak of them. All kinds of strange notions entered my head during that time. I used to think it would be a mercy if a terrible flood were to come, or if someone would set fire to the villa. It would bring these two unhappy beings together for a few minutes at least. But nothing happened; the days were all alike, except that I saw very plainly that my lady could not live through another summer. She was fading away before my eyes.

" The end came at last, when Master Christian was nearly nine years old.

CHAPTER XI

BEATRICE ALMER GIVES A PROMISE TO HER SON

“**I**T was a spring morning, and my lady was alone. Master Christian was in the woods with his father; he was to be home at noon, and my lady was watching for him at her window.

“Exactly at noon the lad returned, beaming with delight; the hours he spent with his father were memorable hours in his life.

“‘You have enjoyed yourself, Christian,’ said my lady, drawing her boy to her side, and smoothing his hair. ‘It does you good to go out with papa.’

“‘Yes, mamma,’ said the lad, in his eager, excited voice. ‘There is no one in the world like papa—no man, I mean. He knows everything—yes, mamma, everything! There isn’t a thing you ask him that he can’t tell you all about it. We have had such a beautiful walk; the forests are full of birds and squirrels. Papa knows the name of every bird and flower. See, mamma, all these are wild flowers—papa helped me to gather them, and showed me where some of the prettiest are to be found. You should hear him talk about the flowers! He has told me such wonderful, wonderful things about them! I believe they live as we do, and that they have a language of their own. Papa smiled when I said I thought the flowers were alive, and he told me that the world was full of the loveliest mysteries, and that, although men thought themselves very wise, they really knew very little. Perhaps it is so—with all men but papa. It is because he isn’t vain and proud that he doesn’t set himself above other men. In the middle of the woods papa stopped and said, as he waved his hand around, ‘This, Christian, is Nature’s book. Not all the wisdom of all the men in all the world could write one line of it. That little bird flying in the air to the nest which it has built for its young, and which is so small that I could hold it in the palm of my hand, is in itself a greater and more

marvellous work than the united wisdom of all mankind shall ever be able to produce." There, mamma, you would hardly believe that I should remember papa's words; but I repeated them to myself over and over again as we walked along—they sounded so wonderful! Mamma, are there flowers in heaven?'

" 'Yes, my dear,' she answered, gazing upwards, 'forever blooming.'

" 'Then it is always summer there, mamma?'

" 'Yes, dear child—it is the better land on which we dwell in hope. Peace is there, and love.'

" 'We shall all go there, mamma?'

" 'Yes, dear child—one day.'

" 'And shall live there in peace and love?'

" 'Yes, Christian.'

" 'Mamma,' said the child solemnly, 'I shall be glad when the day comes on which you and papa and I shall be together there, in peace and love. Mamma, you are crying. I have not hurt you, have I?'

" 'No, dear child, no. To hear you speak gives me great joy.'

" 'Ah, but I can't speak like papa. He has told me of that better world, and though I can't understand all he says, I know it must be very beautiful. Papa is a good man. I love him more than any other man—and I love you, mamma, better than any other woman. Papa is a good man, is he not, mamma?'

" 'Yes, my child,' said my lady, 'your father is a good and a just man.'

" My heart leapt into my throat as I heard her speak these words of her husband. Was it possible that this dreadful estrangement was to end, and that my master and his wife would at length be reconciled, after all these weary years?

" My lady was lying back in her chair, gazing now at her boy, now at the bright clouds which were floating in the heavens. Ah, my lady, if we were but to follow God's teaching, and learn the lessons He sends us every day and every hour, how much unhappiness should we be spared! But it seems as if there was a wicked spirit within us which is continually dropping poison into the

fairest things, for the mere pleasure of destroying their beauty and making us wretched.

“There was an angelic expression on my lady’s face as she encouraged her boy to speak of his father.

“‘I have often wished to tell you,’ said Master Christian, ‘that papa is not strong—not as strong as I am. He soon gets tired, while I can run about all day. This morning he often stopped to rest, and once he threw himself upon the ground, and fell fast asleep. I sat by his side and listened to the birds, who were all so happy, while papa’s face was filled with pain. Yes, mamma, he was in great pain, and he sighed, oh, so heavily! as though sleep was hurting him instead of doing him good. And he spoke in his sleep, and his words made me tremble. “I call God to witness”—that was what he said, mamma—“I call God to witness that there was in my mind no design to do wrong.” And then he said something about sin and sorrow springing from the flower of innocence. A bird was flying near us, stopping to look at us, and not at all frightened, because I was so very, very quiet. “Little bird,” I whispered, “that my father could hold in the palm of his hand, do you know what he is dreaming of, and will you, because he is my father and a good man, do something to make him happy?” Oh, mamma, the bird at that very moment began to sing, and papa smiled in his sleep, and all the pain in his face disappeared. That bird, mamma, was a fairy-bird, and knew that papa ought not to suffer. And presently papa awoke, and folded me tight in his arms, and we sat there quite still, for a long, long time, listening to the singing of the bird. Oh, mamma, mamma! why will you not love papa as I do?’

“Who could resist such pleading? My lady could not.

“‘My child,’ she said, ‘I will send for papa to-morrow.’

“‘You will—you will!’ cried the child. ‘Oh, how glad I am! Papa will be here to-morrow, and we shall live together as poor people do, and be happy, as they are!’ He sprang from her side, ready to fly out of the room. ‘Shall I go and tell papa now? Yes, I may, I may—say that I may, mamma!’

“ ‘Not till to-morrow, Christian. Come and sit quietly by me, and talk to me.’

“He obeyed her, though it was difficult for him to control himself, his joy was so great. He devised numberless schemes in which he and his parents were to take part. They were to go here, and to go there—always together. His friends were to be their friends, and they were to share each other’s pleasures. Rambles in the woods, hunting for wild flowers, visits to poor cottages—he planned all these things in the delight of his heart.

“So they passed the day, the mother and child, and when night came he begged again to be allowed to go to his father and tell him what was in store for him. But my lady was firm.

“ ‘No, Christian,’ she said, ‘you must wait yet for a few hours. They will soon pass away. You are tired, dear child. Go to bed and sleep well.’

“ ‘Good mamma! beautiful mamma!’ said the lad, caressing his mother and stroking her face. ‘I shall dream all night long of to-morrow!’

“She never kissed her child with deeper tenderness than she did on this night. He knelt at her knees and said his prayers, and of his own accord ended with the words: ‘And make my papa and my mamma love each other to-morrow!’

“ ‘Good-night, dear child.’

“ ‘Good-night, dear mamma. I want to-morrow to come quickly. Good-night, Denise.’

“ ‘Good-night, Master Christian.’

“In a few minutes he was asleep. Then my lady called me to her, and spoke gratefully of the manner in which I had performed my services to her.

“ ‘You have been a good and faithful servant to me,’ she said, ‘and you have helped to comfort me. Your duties have been difficult, and you have performed them well.’

“ ‘My lady,’ I said sobbing; I could not keep back my tears, she was so gracious and sweet, ‘I have done nothing to deserve such thanks. If what you have said to Master Christian comes true I shall be very happy. For-

give me for asking, but is it really true that you will send for my master to-morrow?’

“‘It will be so, Denise, unless God in His mercy takes me to-night. We are in His hands, and I wait for His summons. His will be done! Denise, wear this cross in remembrance of me. I kiss it before I give it to you—and I kiss you, Denise!’

“And as she put the cross round my neck, which she took from her own, she kissed me on the lips. Her touch was like an angel’s touch.

“Then she said, pointing to the posy which had been gathered in the woods by her husband and her child:

“‘Give me those flowers, you faithful woman.’

“Do not think me vain or proud for repeating the words she spoke to me. They were very, very precious to me, and the sweetness has not died out of them, though she who uttered them is dust.

“I gave her the flowers, and she held them to her heart, and encouraged me to sit with her later than usual. Two or three times in the midst of our conversation, she asked me to go to Master Christian’s room to see if he was asleep, and when I told her he was sleeping beautifully, and that he looked like an angel, she smiled, and thanked me.

“‘He will grow into a noble man,’ she said, ‘and will, I trust, think of me with tenderness. I often look forward and wonder what his life will be.’

“‘A happy one, I am sure,’ I said.

“‘I pray that it may be so, and that he will meet with a woman who will truly and faithfully love him.’

“Then she asked me if there was a light in her husband’s study, and going out into the balcony to look, I said there was, and said, moreover, that my master often sat up the whole night through, reading and studying.

“‘You have been in his service a long time, Denise,’ said my lady.

“‘Yes, my lady. I was born in this house, and my mother lived and died here.’

“‘Was your master always a student, Denise?’

“‘Always, my lady. Even when he was a boy he would shut himself up with his books. He is not like

other men. From his youngest days we used to speak of him with wonder.'

" 'He is very learned,' said my lady. 'How shall one be forgiven for breaking up his life?'

" 'Ah, my lady,' I said, 'if I dared to speak!'

" 'Speak freely, Denise!'

" And then I described to her what a favourite my master was when he was a lad, and how everybody admired him, although he held himself aloof from people. I spoke of his gentleness, of his kindness, of his goodness to the poor, whom he used to visit and help in secret. I told her that never did woman have a more faithful and devoted lover than my master was to her, nor a man with a nobler heart, nor one who stood more highly in the world's esteem.

" She listened in silence, and did not chide me for my boldness, and when I was done, she said she would retire to rest. But she was so weak that she could scarcely rise from her chair.

" 'I had best remain with you to-night, my lady,' I said; 'you may need my services.'

" 'It is not necessary,' she said; 'I shall require nothing, and I shall be better to-morrow.'

" I considered it my duty to make my master acquainted with his wife's condition, but I did not tell him of her intention to ask him to come to her to-morrow for fear that she should alter her mind. There had been disappointment and vexation enough in the house, and I would not add to it.

" I could not rest, I was so anxious about my lady, and an hour after I was abed, I rose and dressed myself and went to her room. She was on her knees, praying by the bedside of her child, and I stole softly away without disturbing her.

" Again, later in the night, I went to her room. She was sleeping calmly, but her breathing was so light that I could scarcely hear it. In the morning I helped her to dress, and afterwards assisted her to her favourite seat by the window.

" Master Christian was already up and about, and shortly after his mother was dressed he came in loaded

with flowers, to make the room look beautiful, he said, on this happy day.

“It was a day he was never to forget.

CHAPTER XII

THE LAST MEETING BETWEEN HUSBAND AND WIFE

“THE morning passed, and my lady made no sign. Master Christian, flitting restlessly in and out and about the room, waited impatiently for his mother’s instructions to bring her husband to her. I offered her food, but she could not eat it. On the previous day the doctor, who regularly attended her, had said that his services were required at a great distance from the villa, and that he should not be able to visit my lady on the morrow. She had replied:

“‘Do not trouble, doctor; you can do nothing for me.’

“And, indeed, there appeared to be no special necessity for his presence. My lady was not in pain; she looked happy and contented. But she was so quiet, so very, very quiet! Not a word of complaint or suffering, not a moan, not a sigh. Why, therefore, did my heart sink as I gazed at her?

“At length Master Christian was compelled to speak; he could no longer control his impatience.

“‘Mamma, do you like the way I have arranged the flowers? The room looks pretty, does it not?’

“‘Yes, my child.’

“‘I wanted it to look very bright to-day. So did you, did you not, mamma? Papa will be pleased when he comes.’

“‘I hope so, my dear.’

“‘And I shall tell him that it is not so every day, and that it is done for him. Shall I go for him now?’

“‘Presently, my dear. Wait yet a little while.’

“‘But, mamma, it was to be to-day, you know, and it is nearly afternoon. Just look at the clock, mamma, it is nearly two—— Ah, but you are tired, and I am worry-

ing you! Now I will sit quite still, and when the clock strikes two, you shall tell me to go for papa. Say yes, or look it, mamma.'

" 'Yes, my dear, at two o'clock you shall go. Denise will accompany you, for perhaps, Christian, your papa will think that the message comes from your affectionate heart, and not from me.'

" 'That,' said Master Christian, 'is because I have tried to bring papa to you before. But I did it out of love, mamma.'

" 'I know, my dear, I know. If, when you were a little baby, and could not speak or think of things, I had reflected, it might all have been different. Perhaps I have been to blame.'

" 'No, mamma, you shall not say that; I will not let you say that. You can't do anything wrong, and papa can't do anything wrong. Now I shall be quite still, and watch the clock, and I will not say another word till it strikes.'

" He sat, as he had promised, quite still, with his eyes fixed on the clock, and I saw by the motion of his lips that he was counting the seconds. Slowly, oh, so slowly, the hands moved round till they reached the hour, and then the silver chimes were heard. First, the four divisions of the hour, then the hour itself. One, Two. In my ears it was like the chapel bell calling the people to prayer.

" 'Now, mamma!' cried Master Christian, starting up.

" She took his pretty face between her hands, and drew it close to hers. She kissed his lips and his forehead, and then her hands fell to her side.

" 'May I go now, mamma?'

" He saw in her eyes that she was willing he should bring his father, and he embraced her joyfully, and ran out of the room crying:

" 'Come, Denise, come! Papa, papa!'

" He did not wait for me, and when I arrived at the study door, the father and son were standing together, and Master Christian was trying to pull my master along.

" 'This little fellow here,' said my master, striving to speak cheerfully, but his lips trembled, and his voice was

husky, 'has a strong imagination, and his heart is so full of love that it runs away with his tongue.'

" 'It does not, papa, it does not,' cried Master Christian very earnestly. 'And it is not imagination. Mamma wants you to come and love her.'

" My master turned his enquiring eyes to my face.

" 'My lady wishes you to come to her, sir,' I said simply.

" I knew that the fewer words I spoke at such a time the better it would be.

" He did not question me. He was satisfied that I spoke the truth.

" His agitation was great, and he walked a few steps from me, holding Master Christian by the hand, and then stood still for quite a minute. Then he stooped and kissed his son, and suffered himself to be led to my lady's room.

" I followed them at a little distance, and remained outside my lady's room, while they entered and closed the door behind them. It was not right that any eyes but theirs should witness so sacred a meeting; but though I denied myself the pleasure of being present, my heart was in my ears. It was proper that I should be within call. In my lady's weak state, my services might be required.

" From where I stood, I heard Master Christian's eager, happy voice:

" 'Mamma, mamma—here is papa! He is come at last, mamma! Speak to him, and love him, as I do! Papa, put your arms around mamma's neck, and kiss her.'

" Then all was quiet—so quiet, so quiet! Not a sound, not a breath. Ah, Holy Mother! I can *hear* the silence now—I can *feel* it about me! It was in this very room, and my lady was sitting in the chair in which you are seated.

" Suddenly the silence was broken. My master was calling loudly for me.

" 'Denise—Denise! Where are you? Come quickly, for God's sake!'

" Before the words were out of his lips, I was in the room. My master was looking wildly upon his wife and

child. The lad, with his arms about his mother, was kissing her passionately, and crying over her.

“ ‘Mamma, mamma! why do you not speak? Here is papa waiting for you. Oh, mamma, say only one word!’

“ ‘Is it true,’ my master whispered to me, ‘that your lady sent you for me?’

“ ‘It is true, sir,’ I replied in a low tone.

“ ‘What, then, is the meaning of this?’ he asked, still in the same unnatural whisper. ‘I have spoken to her—she will not answer me. She will not even look at me!’

“ A sudden fear smote my heart. I stepped softly to my lady’s side. I gently unwound Master Christian’s arms from his mother’s neck. I took her hand in mine, and pressed it. The pressure was not returned. Her fingers, though still warm, were motionless.

“ ‘What is it, Denise?’ my master asked hoarsely. ‘The truth—the truth!’

“ He read the answer in my eyes. We were gazing on the face of a dead woman!

“ Yes, she was dead, and no word had been exchanged between them—no look of affection—no token of forgiveness. How truly, how prophetically, had she spoken to her husband in their last interview on this spot, eight years before! ‘After this night I will never open my lips to you, nor, willingly, will I ever again listen to your voice!’

“ From that hour to this he had never heard the sound of her voice, and now that, after their long agony—for there is no doubt that his sufferings were as great as hers—she had summoned him to her, she was dead! Ah, if she had only lived to say:

“ ‘Mine was the fault; it was not only I who was betrayed; let there be peace and forgiveness between us!’

“ Did she know, when she called him to her, that he would look upon her dead face? Could she so measure her moments upon earth as to be certain that her heart would cease to beat as he entered the room at her bidding? No, it could not have been, for this premeditation would have proclaimed her capable of vindictive passion. She was full of tender feeling and sweet compassion, and the

influence of her child *must* have softened her heart towards the man who had loved and married her, and had done her no wrong.

“That she knew she was dying was certain, and she was willing—nay more than willing, wishful to forgive and to ask forgiveness as she stood upon the brink of another world. The sight of his worn and wasted face may have shocked her and caused her sudden death. But it remained a mystery whether she had seen him—whether her spirit had not taken flight before her husband presented himself to her. It was a question none could answer.

“I am aware that there are people who would say that my lady deliberately designed this last bitter blow to her husband. My master did not think so. When the first shock of his grief was spent, his face expressed nothing but sorrow and compassion. He kissed her once—on her forehead, not on her lips—and after her eyes were closed and she lay, white and beautiful, upon her bed, he sat by her side the whole of the day and night—for a great part of the time with Master Christian in his arms.

“There were those in the villa who declared that on the night of her death the white shadow of my lady was seen gliding about the grounds, and from that day the place was supposed to be haunted. For my own part I knew that these were foolish fancies, but you cannot reason people out of them.

“The next day my master made preparations for the funeral. His strange manner of conducting it strengthened the superstition. He would not have any of his old friends at the funeral, although many wrote to him. Only himself and Master Christian and the servants followed my lady to her grave. He would not allow any black crape to be worn, and all the female servants of the house were dressed in white.

“It caused a great deal of talk, a good many people saying that it was a sinful proceeding on the part of my master, and that it was a sign of joy at his wife’s death. They must have been blind to the grief in his face—so plainly written there that the tears came to my eyes as I looked at it—when they uttered this slander. And yet, if the

truth were told, if it were deeply searched for among the ashes in his heart, it is not unlikely that my master was sorrowfully grateful that his wife's martyrdom was at an end. For her sake, not for his own, did he experience this sad feeling of gratitude. It was entirely in accordance with his stern sense of justice—in the exercise of which he was least likely to spare himself of all people in the world—that, while he was bowed down to the earth in grief, he should be glad that his wife was dead.

“All kinds of rumours were afloat concerning the house and the family. The gossips declared that on certain nights the grounds were filled with white shadows, mournfully following each other in a long funeral train. That is how the villa grew to be called *The House of Shadows*.

“It was like a tomb. Not a person was permitted to pass the gates. Not a servant could be prevailed upon to stop. All of them left, with the exception of Martin and myself, and my daughter, Dionetta's mother. Dionetta was not born at the time. We were glad to take Fritz the Fool into the place, to run of errands and do odd jobs. He was a young lad then, an orphan, and has been hanging about ever since. But for all the good he is, he might as well be at the other end of the world.

“The rumours spread into distant quarters, and one day a priest, who had travelled scores of miles for the purpose of seeing my master, presented himself at the gates, which were always kept locked by my master's orders. I asked the priest what he wanted, and he said he must speak to Mr. Almer. I told him that no person was admitted, and that my master would see none, but he insisted that I should give his errand. I did so, and my master accompanied me to the gates.

“‘You have received your answer from my servant,’ said my master. ‘Why do you persist in your attempts to force yourself upon me?’

“‘My errand is a solemn one,’ said the priest; ‘I am bidden by Heaven to come to you.’

“My master smiled scornfully. ‘What deeds in my life,’ he said, ‘I shall be called upon to answer for before a divine tribunal, concern me, and me only. Were you an officer of justice you should be admitted; but you are

a priest, and I do not need you. I am my own priest. Begone.'

"He was importunate, and was not so easily got rid of. Day after day, for two weeks, he made his appearance at the gates, but he could not obtain admittance, and at length he was compelled to forego his mission, whatever it might have been, and to leave without having any further speech with my master.

"Soon after he left, my master took Master Christian to school, at a great distance from the village, and returning alone, resumed his solitary habits.

"How well do I remember the evening on which he desired me not to disturb him on any account whatever, and to come to his study at four o'clock on the afternoon of the following day. At that hour, I knocked at the door, and received no answer. I knocked several times, and, becoming alarmed, tried the handle of the door. It was unlocked, and I stepped into the study, and said:

"'It is I, sir, Denise; you bade me come at this hour.'

"I spoke to deaf ears. On the floor lay my master stone dead!

"He had not killed himself; he died a natural death, and must have been forewarned that his moments on earth were numbered.

"That is all I have to tell, my lady."

CHAPTER XIII

THE ARRIVAL OF CHRISTIAN ALMER

"**A**ND you have really told it very well, Mother Denise," said the Advocate's wife; "with such sentiment, and in such beautiful language! It is a great talent: I don't know when I have been so interested. Why, in some parts you actually gave me the creeps! And here is Dionetta, as white as a lily. What a comfort it must have been to the poor lady to have had a good soul like you about her! If such a misfortune happened to me, I should like to have just such a servant as you were to her."

"Heaven forbid, my lady," said Mother Denise, raising her hands, "that such an unhappy lot should be yours!"

"Well, to tell you the truth," said Adelaide, with a bright smile, "I do not think it at all likely to happen. Of course, there is no telling what one might have to go through. Men are such strange creatures, and lead such strange lives! They may do anything—absolutely anything!—fight, gamble, make love without the least sincerity, deceive poor women and forsake them—yes, they may do all that, and the world will smile indulgently upon them. But if one of us, Mother Denise, makes the slightest trip, dear me! what a fuss is made about it—how shocked everybody is! A perfect carnival for the scandal-mongers! 'Isn't it altogether too dreadful.' 'Did you ever hear of such a thing?' 'Would you have believed it of her?' That is what is said by all sorts of people. But if *I* happened to be treated badly I should not submit to it tamely—nor between you and me, Mother Denise, in my opinion, did the lady whose story you have just related."

"Everything occurred," said Mother Denise stiffly, "exactly as I have described it."

"With a small allowance," said Adelaide archly, "for exaggeration, and with here and there a chapter left out. Come, you must admit that!"

"I have omitted nothing, my lady. I am angry with myself for having told so much. I doubt whether I have not done wrong."

"Mr. Christian Almer, whom I expect every minute"—and Adelaide looked at her watch—"would have been seriously annoyed with you if you had not satisfied my curiosity. Where is the harm? To be living here, with such an interesting tale untold, would have been inexcusable, perfectly inexcusable. But I am certain that you have purposely passed over more than one chapter, and I admire you for it. It is highly to your credit not to have told all you know, though it could hurt no one at this distance of time."

"What do you think I have concealed, my lady?"

"There was a certain M. Gabriel," said Adelaide, "who

played a most important part in the story—a good many people would say, the most important part. If it had not been for him, there would have been no story to tell worth the hearing; there would have been no quarrel between husband and wife, and the foolish young lady would not have died, and I should not be here, listening to her story, and ready to cry my eyes out in pity for her. M. Gabriel must have been a very handsome young fellow, or there would not have been such a fuss made about him. There! I declare you have never even given me a description of him. Of course he was handsome.”

She was full of vivacity, and as she leaned forward towards the old housekeeper, it appeared as if, in her estimation, nothing connected with the story she had heard was of so much importance as this question, which she repeated anxiously, “Tell me, Mother Denise, was he handsome?”

“He was exceedingly good-looking,” Mother Denise was constrained to reply, “but not so distinguished in his bearing as my unhappy master.”

“Tall?”

“Yes, tall, my lady.”

“Dark or fair? But I think you gave me the impression that he was dark.”

“Yes, my lady, he was dark,” replied Mother Denise, coldly, more and more displeased at the frivolity of the questions.

“And young, of course—much younger than Mr. Almer?”

“Much younger, my lady.”

“There would be no sense in the matter otherwise; any one might guess that he was young and handsome and fascinating. Well, as I was about to say—I hope you will forgive me for flying off as I do; my head gets so full of ideas that they tumble over one another—all at once this M. Gabriel drops clean out of the story, and we hear nothing more of him. If there is one thing more inexplicable than another in the affair, it is that nothing more should be heard of M. Gabriel.”

“We live out of the gay world, my lady; far removed from it, I am happy to think. It is not at all strange that

in this quiet village we should not know what became of him."

"That is assuming that M. Gabriel went back into the gay world, as you call it, which is not such a bad place, I assure you, Mother Denise."

"He could not have stopped in the village, my lady, without its being known."

"Probably not; but, you dear old soul!" said Adelaide, her manner becoming more animated as that of Mother Denise became more frigid, "you dear old soul, they always come back! When lovers are dismissed, as M. Gabriel was, they always come back. They think they never will—they vow they never will—but they cannot help themselves. They are not their own masters. It is the story of the moth and the candle over again."

"You mean, my lady," said Mother Denise, very gravely, "that M. Gabriel returned to the villa."

"That is my meaning exactly. What else could he do?"

"I will not say whether I am glad or sorry to disappoint you, my lady, but M. Gabriel, after the summer-house was barred up, never made his appearance again in the village."

"Of course, under the circumstances, he could not show himself to everybody. It was necessary that he should be cautious. He had to come quietly—secretly, if you like."

"He never came, my lady," said Mother Denise, with determination.

"But he wrote, and sent his letters by a confidential messenger; he did that at least."

"I told you, my lady, that while my poor mistress lived in these rooms she never received or wrote a letter."

"If that is so, his letters to her must have been intercepted."

"There were no letters," said Mother Denise, stubbornly.

"There were," said Adelaide, smiling a reproof to Mother Denise. "I know the ways of men better than you do."

"By whom, my lady, do you suppose these imaginary letters were intercepted?"

"By her husband, of course, you dear, simple soul!"

"Mr. Almer could not have been guilty of such an act."

The Advocate's wife gazed admiringly at the house-keeper. "Dionetta," she exclaimed, "never be tempted to betray your mistress's secrets; take pattern by your grandmother."

"She might do worse, my lady," said Mother Denise, still unbending.

"Indeed she might. I am thinking of something. On the night you were aroused from your sleep, and heard the sound of a man falling to the ground——"

"I only fancied it was a man, my lady; we never learnt the truth."

"It was a man, and he climbed the wall. And he chose a dark and stormy night for his adventure. He was a brave fellow. I quite admire him."

"Admire a thief!" exclaimed Mother Denise, in horror.

"My dear old soul, you *must* know it was not a thief. The house was not robbed, was it?"

"No, my lady, nothing was taken; but what is the use of speaking of it?"

"When once I get an idea into my head," said Adelaide, "it carries me along, whether I like it or not. So, then—some time after you heard a man falling or jumping from the wall, you heard the sound of someone walking in the paths outside. He was fearful of disturbing anyone in the house, and he trod very, very softly. I should have done just the same. Now can't you guess the name of that man?"

"No, my lady, it was never discovered. He was a villain, whoever he was, to poison our dogs."

"That was a small matter. What is the life of a dog—of a thousand dogs—when a man is in love?"

"My lady!" cried Mother Denise. "What is it you are saying?"

"Nothing will deter him," continued Adelaide, with an intense enjoyment of the old woman's uneasiness, "nothing will frighten him, if he is brave and earnest, as M. Gabriel was. You dear old soul, the man you heard in the grounds that night was M. Gabriel, and he came

to see your mistress—perhaps to carry her off! This window is not very high; I could almost jump from it myself.”

Mother Denise pressed her hand to her side, as though to relieve a sudden pain; her face was white with a newly born apprehension.

“Do you really believe, my lady,” she asked in trembling tones, “that M. Gabriel would have dared to enter the grounds in the dead of night, like a thief, after what had occurred?”

“I certainly believe it; it was the daring of a lover, not of a thief. Were any traces of blood discovered in the grounds?”

“None were discovered; but if blood was spilt, the rain would have washed it away.”

“Or it could have been wiped away in the dark night!”

“Is it possible,” said Mother Denise under her breath, “that you can be right, and that my master and M. Gabriel met on that night!”

“The most probable occurrence in the world,” said Adelaide, with a pleasant smile. “What should have made your old master so anxious that you should not speak of the sounds you heard? He had a motive, depend upon it.”

Mother Denise, who had sunk into a chair in great agitation, suddenly rose, and said abruptly:

“My lady, this is very painful to me. Will you allow me to go?”

“Certainly; do not let me detain you a moment. I cannot express to you the obligations you have laid me under by relating the history of this house and family. There is nothing more to do in these rooms, I believe. How very, very pretty they look! We must do everything in our power to make the place pleasant to the young master who is coming. But I think I can promise he will be happy here.”

Not even Adelaide’s smiles and good-humour could smooth Mother Denise’s temper for the rest of the day.

“Mark my words, Martin,” she said to her husband, “something wrong will happen before the Advocate and his fine lady leave the villa. She has put such horrible

ideas into my head! Ah, but I will not think of them; it is treason, rank treason! We shall rue the day she came among us."

"Ha, ha!" chuckled the old man slyly. "You're jealous, Denise, you're jealous! She is the pleasantest lady, and the sweetest spoken, and the most generous, and the handsomest, for twenty miles round. The whole village is in love with her."

"And you as well as the rest, I suppose," snapped Mother Denise.

"I don't say that—I don't say that," piped Martin, with a childish laugh. "Never kiss and tell, Denise, never kiss and tell! If I was young and straight——"

"But you're old and crooked," retorted Mother Denise, "and your mind's going, if it hasn't gone already. You grow sillier and sillier every day."

A reproach the old man received with gleeful laughs and tiresome coughs. His worship of the beautiful lady was not to be lightly disturbed.

"The sweetest and the handsomest!" he chuckled, as he hobbled away, at the rate of half a mile an hour. "I'd walk twenty mile to serve her—twenty mile—twenty mile!"

"And this is actually the room," said Adelaide, walking about it, "in which that poor lady spent so many unhappy years! Her prison! Her grave! Dionetta, my pretty one, when the chance of happiness is offered to you, do not throw it away. Life is short. Enjoy it. A great many people moralise and preach, but if you were to see what they do, and put it in by the side of what they say, you would understand what fools those people must be who believe in their moralising and preaching. The persecuted lady whose story your grandmother has told us—what happiness did she enjoy in her life? None. Do you know why, Dionetta? Because it was life without love. Love is life's sunshine. Better to be dead than to live without it! Hark! Is not that a carriage driving up at the gates?"

She ran swiftly from the room, down the stairs, into the grounds. The gates were thrown open. A young man, just alighted, came towards her. She ran forward

to meet him, with outstretched hands, with face beaming with joy. He took her hands in his.

"Welcome, Mr. Almer," she said aloud, so that those around her could hear her. "You have had a pleasant journey, I hope." And then, in a whisper, "Christian!"

"Adelaide!" he said, in a tone as low as hers.

"Now I am the happiest woman!" she murmured. "It is an eternity since I saw you. How could you have kept away from me so long?"

BOOK IV.—THE BATTLE WITH CONSCIENCE

CHAPTER I

LAWYER AND PRIEST

IT happened that certain persons had selected this evening as a suitable occasion for a friendly visit to the House of White Shadows; Jacob Hartrich, the banker, was one of these. The banker was accompanied by his wife, a handsome and dignified woman, and by his two daughters, whose personal attractions, enhanced by their father's wealth and their consequent expectations, would have created a sensation in fashionable circles. Although in his religious observances Jacob Hartrich was by no means orthodox, he did not consider himself less a true Jew on that account. It is recognised by the most intelligent and liberal-minded of his race in the civilised countries of the world that the carrying-out of the Mosaic law in its integrity would not only debar them from social relations, but would check their social advancement. It is a consequence of the recognition of this undoubted fact that the severe ordinances of the Jewish religion should become relaxed in their fulfilment. Jacob Hartrich was a member of this band of reformers, and though his conscience occasionally gave him a twinge, he was none the less devoted, in a curiously jealous and illogical spirit, to the faith of his forefathers, to which he clung with the greater tenacity because his daily habits compelled him to act, to some extent, in antagonism with the decrees they had laid down.

Master Pierre Lamont was also at the villa. His bodily ailments were more severe than usual, and the jolting over the rough roads, as he was drawn from his house in his hand-carriage, had caused him excruciating suffering.

He bore it with grins and grimaces, scorning to give pain an open triumph over him. Fritz was not by his side to amuse him with his humour; the Fool was at the court, on this last day of Gautran's trial, as he had been on every previous day, hastening thence every evening to Pierre Lamont, to give him an account of the day's proceedings.

Father Capel was there—a simple and learned ecclesiastic, with a smile and a pleasant greeting for old and young, for rich and poor alike. A benevolent, sweet-natured man, who, when trouble came to his door, received it with cheerful resignation; universally beloved; a man whose course through life was strewn with flowers of charity and kindness.

The visit of these and other guests was unexpected by Adelaide, and she inwardly resented the interruption to a contemplated quiet evening with Christian Almer; but outwardly she was all affability.

The principal topic of conversation was the trial of Gautran, and Pierre Lamont was enthusiastic on the theme.

“The trial will end this evening,” he said, “and intellect will triumph.”

“Truth, I trust, will triumph,” said Jacob Hartrich, gravely.

“Intellect is truth's best champion,” said Pierre Lamont. “But some mortals believe themselves to be omniscient, and set up a standard of truth which is independent of proof. I understood that you were to have been on the jury at the trial.”

“I was excused,” said Jacob Hartrich, “on the ground that I had already formed so strong a view of the guilt of the prisoner that no testimony could affect it.”

“Decidedly,” observed Pierre Lamont, “an unfit frame of mind to take part in a judicial inquiry of great difficulty. For my own part, I would willingly have given a year of my life, which cannot have too many years to run, to have been able to be in Geneva these last few days. It will be long before another trial so celebrated will take place in our courts.”

“I am happy to think so.”

"It has always been a puzzle to me," said Adelaide, whose feelings towards Pierre Lamont were of the most contradictory character—now inclining her to be exceedingly partial to him, now to detest him—"how such vulgar cases can excite the interest they do."

"It is surprising," was Pierre Lamont's comment, "that the wife of an Advocate so celebrated should express such an opinion."

"There are stranger things than that in the world, Master Lamont."

"Truly, truly," said Pierre Lamont, regarding her with curiosity; "but cannot you understand how even these vulgar cases become, at least for a time, great and grand when the highest qualities of the mind are engaged in unravelling the threads which bind them?"

"No, I cannot understand it," she replied with an amiable smile. "I believe that you lawyers are only happy when people are murdering and robbing each other."

"My friend the Advocate," said Pierre Lamont, bending gallantly, an exertion which sent a twinge of pain through his body, "is at least happy in one other respect—that of being the husband of a lady whom none can see without admiring—if I were a younger man I should say without loving."

"Pierre Lamont," said Jacob Hartrich, "gives us here a proof that love and law can go hand in hand."

"Nay," said Pierre Lamont, whose eyes and mind were industriously studying the face of his beautiful hostess, "such proof from me is not needed. The Advocate has supplied it, and words cannot strengthen the case."

And he waved his hand courteously towards Adelaide.

These compliments were not wasted upon her, and Pierre Lamont laughed secretly as he observed their effect.

"You are worth studying, fair dame," he thought, "with your smiling face, and your heart of vanity, and your lack of sympathy with your husband's triumphs. If not with his triumphs, then not with him! Feeling you *must* have, though it is born of selfishness. Ah! the curtain is drawn aside. Which one, which one, you beauti-

ful animal?" His eyes travelled from one to the other in the room, until they fell upon Christian Almer, whose eyes at that moment met those of Adelaide. "Ah!" and he drew a deep breath of enjoyment. "Are you the favoured one, my master of this House of Shadows! Then we must take you into the game, for it cannot be played without you."

The old lawyer was in his element, probing character and motive, and submitting them to mental analysis. Physically he was helpless amidst the animated life around him; curled up in his invalid chair he was dependent for every movement upon his fellow-creatures; despite his intellect, he was at the mercy of a hind; but he was nevertheless the strongest man in all that throng, the man most to be feared by those who had anything to conceal, any secret which it behoved them to hide from the knowledge of men.

"How such vulgar cases," he said aloud, to the astonishment of the Advocate's wife, who deemed the subject dismissed, "can excite the interest they do! It surprises you. But there is not one of these cases which does not contain elements of human sympathy and affinity with ourselves. This very case of Gautran—what is its leading feature? Love—the theme of minstrel and poet, the sentiment without which human and divine affairs would be plunged into darkness. Crimes for which Gautran is being tried are caused by the human passions and emotions which direct our own movements. The balance in our favour is so heavy when our desires and wishes clash with the desires and wishes of other men, that we easily find justification for our misdeeds. Father Capel is listening to me with more than ordinary attention. He perceives the justice of my argument."

"We travel by different roads," said Father Capel. "You do not take into account the prompting of evil spirits, ever on the alert to promote discord and instigate to crime. It is that consideration which makes me tolerant of human error, which makes me pity it, which makes me forgive it."

"I dispute your spiritual basis. All motive for crime springs from within ourselves."

"Nay, nay," gently remonstrated Father Capel.

"Pardon me for restraining you. I was about to say that not only does all motive for human crime spring from within ourselves, but all motive for human goodness as well. If your thesis that evil spirits prompt us to crime is correct, it must be equally correct that good spirits prompt us to deeds of mercy, and charity, and kindness. Then there is no merit in performing a good action. You rob life of its grace, and you virtually declare that it is an injustice to punish a man for murdering his fellow-creature. Plainly stated, you establish the doctrine of irresponsibility. I will not do you the injustice of believing that you are in earnest. Your tolerance of human error, and your pity and forgiveness for it, spring from natural kindliness, as my tolerance of it, and my lack of pity and forgiveness for it, spring from a natural hardness of heart, begot of much study of the weakness, perverseness, and selfishness of my species. In the rank soil of these imperfections grows that wondrous, necessary tree known by the name of Law, whose wide-spreading branches at once smite and protect. You may thank this tree for preserving to some extent the decencies of society."

"Well expressed, Pierre Lamont," said Jacob Hartrich approvingly. "I regret that the Advocate is not present to listen to your eloquence."

"Ah," said Pierre Lamont, with a scarcely perceptible sneer, "does your endorsement spring from judgment or self-interest?"

"You strike both friend and foe," said Father Capel, with much gentleness. "It is as dangerous to agree with you as to dissent from you. But in your extravagant laudation of the profession of which you are a representative you lose sight of a mightier engine than Law, towering far above it in usefulness, and as a protection, no less than a solace to mankind. Without Religion, Law would be powerless, and the world a world of wild beasts. It softens, humanises——"

"Invents," sneered Pierre Lamont, with undisguised contempt, "fables which sober reason rejects."

"If you will have it so, yes. Fables to divert men's

minds from sordid materialism into purer channels. Be thankful for Religion if you practise it not. In the Sabbath's holy peace, in the hush and calm of one day out of the turbulent seven, in the influences which touch you closely, though you do not acknowledge them, in the restraint imposed by fear, in the charitable feelings inspired by love, in the unseen spirit which softens and subdues, in the yearning hope which chastens grief when one dear to you is lost, lie the safeguard of your days and much of the happiness you enjoy. So much for your body. For your soul, I will pray to-night."

"Father Capel," said Pierre Lamont in a voice of honey, "if all priests were like you, I would wear a hair-shirt to-morrow."

"What need, my son," asked Father Capel, "if you have a conscience?"

"Let me pay for my sins," said Pierre Lamont, handing his purse to the priest.

Father Capel took a few francs from the purse. "For the poor," he said. "In their name I bless you!"

"The priest has the best of it," said Adelaide to Christian Almer. "I hate these dry arguments! It is altogether too bad that I should be called upon to entertain a set of musty old men. How much happier we should be, we two alone, even in the mountains where you have been hiding yourself from me!"

"You are in better health and spirits," said Jacob Hartrich, drawing Almer aside, "than when I last saw you. The mountain air has done you good. It is strange to see you in the old house; I thought it would never be opened again to receive guests."

"It is many years since we were together under this roof," said Christian Almer thoughtfully.

"You were so young at the time," rejoined the banker, "that you can scarcely have a remembrance of it."

"My remembrance is very keen. I could have been scarcely six years of age, and we had no visitors. I remember that my curiosity was excited because you were admitted."

"I came on business," said Jacob Hartrich, and then, unwilling to revive the sad reminiscences of the young

man's childhood, he said abruptly: "Almer, you should marry." His eyes wandered to his two comely daughters.

"What is that you are saying?" interposed the Advocate's wife; "that Mr. Almer should marry? If I were a man—how I wish I were!—nothing, nothing in the world would tempt me to marry. I would live a life without chain or shackle."

"So, so, my fair dame," thought Pierre Lamont, who had overheard this remark. "Bright as you appear, there is a skeleton in your cupboard. Chains and shackles! But you are sufficiently self-willed to throw these off." And he said aloud: "Can you ascertain for me if Fritz the Fool has returned from Geneva?"

"Certainly," replied Adelaide, and Dionetta being in the room, she sent her out to inquire.

"If he has returned," said Pierre Lamont, "the trial is over. I miss the fool's nightly report of the proceedings, which he has given me regularly since the commencement of the inquiry."

"If the trial is over," said Christian Almer, "the Advocate should be here."

"You need not expect him so soon," said Pierre Lamont; "after such exertion as he has gone through, an hour's solitude is imperative. Besides, Fritz can travel faster than our slow-going horses; he is as fleet as a hare."

"A favourite of yours, evidently."

"I have the highest respect for him. This particular fool is the wisest fool in my acquaintance."

Dionetta entered the room with Fritz at her heels.

"Well, Fritz," called out Pierre Lamont, "is the trial over?"

"Yes, Master Lamont, and we're ready for the next."

"The verdict, Fritz, the verdict?" eagerly inquired Pierre Lamont, and everybody in the room listened anxiously for the reply.

"If I were a bandy-legged man," said Fritz, ignoring the question, "I would hire some scoundrel to do a deed, so that you might be on one side and my lord the Advo-

cate on the other. Then we should witness a fine battle of brains."

"Come, Fritz—the verdict!" repeated Pierre Lamont impatiently.

"On second thoughts," said Fritz quietly, "you would be no match for the greatest lawyer living. I would not have you on my side. It is as well that your pleading days are ended."

"No fooling, Fritz. The verdict; Acquitted?"

"What else? Washed white as driven snow."

"I knew it would be so," cried the old lawyer triumphantly. "How was it received?"

"The town is mad about it. The women are furious, and the men thunderstruck. You should have heard the speech! Such a thing was never known. Men's minds were twisted inside out, and the jury were convinced against their convictions. Why, Master Lamont, even Gautran himself for a few minutes believed himself to be innocent!"

"Enough," said Christian Almer sternly. "Leave the room."

Fritz darted a sharp look at the newly returned master, and with a low bow quitted the apartment. The next moment the Advocate made his appearance, and all eyes were turned towards him.

CHAPTER II

THE WHITE SHADOW

HE entered the room with a cloud upon his face. Gautran's horrible confession had deeply moved him, and, almost for the first time in his life, he found himself at fault. His heart was heavy, and his mind was troubled; but he had never yet lost his power of self-control, and the moment he saw his guests the mask fell over his features, and they assumed their usual tranquil expression. He greeted one and another with calmness and courtesy, leaving his wife and Christian Almer to the last.

"I am happy to tell you, Adelaide," he said, "that the trial is over."

"Oh, we have already had the news," she said coldly. "Fool Fritz has given us a glowing account of it, and the excitement the verdict created."

"Did it create excitement?" he asked. "I was not aware of it."

"I take no interest in such cases, as you are aware," she rejoined. "You knew the man was innocent, or you would not have defended him. It is a pity the monster is set free."

"Last, but not least," said the Advocate, turning to Christian Almer, and cordially pressing his hand. "Welcome, and again welcome! You have come to stay?"

Adelaide answered for him:

"Certainly he has; I have his promise."

"That is well," said the Advocate. "I am glad to see you looking so bright, Christian."

"You have not derived much benefit from your holiday," said Christian Almer, gazing at the Advocate's pale face. "Was it wise to take upon yourself the weight of so harassing a trial?"

"Do we always do what is wise?" asked the Advocate, with a smile in which there was no light.

"But seldom, I should say," replied Almer. "I once had great faith in the power of Will; but I am beginning to believe that we are as completely slaves to independent forces as feathers in a fierce wind: driven this way or that in spite of ourselves. Not inward, but outward magnetism rules us. Perhaps the best plan is to submit without a struggle."

"Of course it is," said Adelaide with a bright look, "if it is pleasant to submit. It is ridiculous to make one's head ache over things. I can teach you, in a word, a wiser lesson than either of you have ever learnt."

"What is that word, Adelaide?" asked the Advocate.

"Enjoy," she replied.

"A butterfly's philosophy. What say you, Christian? Shall we follow the teaching of this Solon in petticoats?"

"May I join you?" said Pierre Lamont, who had caused himself to be drawn to this group. "My infirmi-

ties make me a privileged person, and unless I thrust myself forward, I might be left to languish like a decrepit spider in a ruined web."

"Ill-natured people," remarked Adelaide, "might say that your figure of speech is a dangerous one for a lawyer to employ."

"Fairest of dames," said Pierre Lamont, "your arrows are sugar-tipped; there is no poison in them. Use me as your target, I beg. You put new life into this old frame."

"The old school can teach the new," said Christian Almer. "You should open a class of gallantry, Master Lamont."

"I! with my useless limbs! You mock me!"

"He will not allow me to be angry with him," said Adelaide, smiling on the lawyer.

Then Pierre Lamont drew the Advocate into a conversation on the trial which the Advocate would gladly have avoided, could he have done so without being considered guilty of a breach of courtesy. But Pierre Lamont was not a man to be denied, and the Advocate was fain to answer the questions put to him until the old lawyer was acquainted with every detail of the line of defence.

"Excellent—excellent!" he exclaimed. "A master-stroke! You do not share my enthusiasm," he said, addressing Jacob Hartrich, who had stood silently by, listening to the conversation. "You have no understanding of the intense, the fierce delight of such a battle and such a victory."

"The last word is not spoken here on earth," said Jacob Hartrich. "There is a higher tribunal."

"Well said, my son," said Father Capel.

"Son!" said Pierre Lamont to the banker, with a little scornful laugh. "Resent the familiarity, man of another faith."

"Better any faith than none," warmly remarked Jacob Hartrich, cordially taking the hand which Father Capel held out to him.

"Good! good! good!" cried Pierre Lamont. "I stand renounced by church and synagogue."

"You are uncharitable only to yourself," said Father Capel. "I, for one, will not take you at your word."

Pierre Lamont lowered his eyes. "You teach me humility," he said.

"Profit by it," rejoined Father Capel.

"You formed the opinion that Gautran was guilty," said Pierre Lamont to the banker. "Upon what evidence?"

"Inward conviction," briefly replied Jacob Hartrich.

"You, at least," said Pierre Lamont, turning his wily face to Father Capel, "although you look at human affairs through Divine light, have a respect for the law."

"Undoubtedly," was the reply.

"But this man of finance," said Pierre Lamont, "would destroy its very fabric when it clashes with his inward conviction. Argue with him, and your words fall against a steel wall, impenetrable to logic, reason, natural deduction, and even common sense—and behind this wall lurks a self-sufficient imp which he calls Inward Conviction. Useful enough, nay, necessary, in religion, for it needs no proof. Faith answers for all. Accept, and rest content. I congratulate you, Jacob Hartrich. But does it not occur to you that others, besides yourself, may have inward convictions antagonistic to yours, and that occasionally theirs may be the true conviction and yours the false? Our friend the Advocate, for instance. Do you think it barely possible that he would have undertaken the defence of Gautran unless he had an inward conviction, formed upon a sure foundation, that the man was innocent of the crime imputed to him?"

It was with some indignation that Jacob Hartrich replied, "That a man of honour would voluntarily come forward as a defender under any conditions than that of the firmest belief in the prisoner's innocence is incredible."

"We agree upon this point I am happy to know, and upon another—that in the profession to which I have the honour to belong, there are men whose actions are guided by the highest and finest principles, and whose motives spring from what I conceive to be the most ennobling of all impulse, a desire for justice."

"Who can doubt it?"

"How, then, stands the case as between you and my brother the Advocate? You have an inward conviction

of Gautran's guilt—he an inward conviction of Gautran's innocence. Up to a certain time you and he are on an equality; your knowledge of the crime is derived from hearsay and newspaper reports. Upon that evidence you rest; you have your business to attend to—the value of money, the fluctuations of the Exchanges, the public movements which affect securities, in addition to the anxieties springing from your private transactions. The Advocate cannot afford to depend upon hearsay and the newspapers. It is his business to investigate, to unearth, to bring together the scattered bones and fit them one with another, to reason, to argue, to deduce. As all the powers of your mind are brought to bear upon your business, which is money, so all the powers of his mind are brought to bear upon his, which is Gautran, in connection with the crime of which he stands accused. His inward conviction of the man's innocence is strengthened no less by the facts which come to light than by the presumptive evidence he is enabled by his patience and application to bring forward in favour of his client. You and he are no longer on an equality. He is a man informed, you remain in ignorance. He has dissected the body, and all the arteries of the crime are exposed to his sight and judgment. You merely raise up a picture—a dark night, a river, a girl vainly struggling with her fate, a murderer (with veiled face) flying from the spot, or looking with brutal calmness upon his victim. That is the entire extent of your knowledge. You seize a brush—you throw light upon the darkness—you paint the river and the girl—you paint the portrait of the murderer, Gautran. All is clear to you. You have formed your own court of justice, imagination affords the proof, and prejudice is the judge. It is an easy and agreeable task to find the prisoner guilty. You are satisfied. You believe you have fulfilled a duty, whereas you have been but a stumbling-block in the path of justice.”

“Notwithstanding which,” said Jacob Hartrich, who had thoroughly recovered his good humour, “I have as firm a conviction as ever in the guilt of Gautran the woodman.”

“Admonish this member of a stiff-necked race, Father

Capel," said Pierre Lamont, "and tell him why reason was given to man."

Earnest as the old lawyer was in the discussion, and apparently engaged in it to the exclusion of all other subjects, he had eyes and ears for everything that passed in the room. Retirement from the active practice of his profession had by no means rusted his powers; on the contrary, indeed, for it had developed in him a finer and more subtle capacity of observation. It gave him time, also, to devote himself to matters which, at an earlier period of his life, he would have considered trivial. Thus, when he moved in private circles, freed from larger duties, there lurked in him always a possible danger, and although he would not do mischief for mischief's sake, he was irresistibly drawn in its direction. The quality of his mind was such as to seek out for itself, and unerringly detect, human blemish. He was ready, when it was presented to him, to recognise personal goodness, but while he recognised he did not admire it. The good man was in his eyes a negative character, pithless, uninteresting; his dominant qualities, being on the surface, presented no field for study. He himself, as has already been seen, was not loth to bestow money in charity, but he was destitute of benevolence; his soul never glowed with pity, nor did the sight of suffering touch his heart. While goodness did not attract him, he took no interest in the profligate or dissolute. His magnet was of the Machiavellian type. Cunning, craft, duplicity, guile—here he was at home in his glory. As easy to throw him off the scent as a bloodhound.

Chiefly on this occasion was his attention given to the Advocate's wife. Not a movement, not a gesture, not a varying shade of expression escaped him. Any person, noting his observance of her, would have detected in it nothing but admiration; and to this conclusion Adelaide herself—she knew when she was admired—was by no means averse. But his eye was upon her when she was not aware of it.

"Have I not heard of a case," asked a guest of Pierre Lamont, "in which a lawyer defended a murderer, knowing him to be guilty?"

"Yes," said Pierre Lamont, "there was such a case. The murder was a ruthless murder; the lawyer a man of great attainments. His speech to the court was eloquent and thrilling, and in it he declared his solemn belief in the prisoner's innocence, and made an appeal to God to strengthen the declaration. It created a profound impression. But the evidence was conclusive, and the prisoner was found guilty. It then transpired that the accused, in his cell, had confessed to his advocate that he had perpetrated the murder."

"Confessed before his trial?"

"Yes, before the trial."

"What became of the lawyer?"

"He was ruined, socially and professionally. A great career was blighted."

"A deserved punishment," remarked Father Capel.

"Yet it is an open question," said Pierre Lamont, "whether the secrets of the prison-cell should not be held as sacred as those of the confessional."

"Nothing can justify," said Father Capel, "the employment of such an appeal, used to frustrate the ends of justice."

"Then," said Pierre Lamont with malicious emphasis, "you admit the doctrine of responsibility. Your prompting of evil spirits, what becomes of it?"

Father Capel did not have time to reply, for a cry of terror from a visitor gave an unexpected turn to the gossip of the evening, and diverted it into a common channel. The person who had uttered this cry was the youngest daughter of Jacob Hartrich. She had been standing at a window, the heavy curtains of which she had held aside, in an idle moment, to look out upon the grounds, which were wrapped in a pall of deep darkness. Upon the utterance of her terrified scream she had retreated into the room, and was now gazing with affrighted eyes at the curtains, which her loosened hold had allowed to fall over the window. Her mother and sister hurried to her side, and most of the other guests clustered around her. What had occasioned her alarm? When she had sufficiently recovered she gave an explanation of it. She was looking out, without any purpose in her mind, "thinking of

nothing," as she expressed it, when, in a distant part of the grounds, there suddenly appeared a bright light, which moved slowly onward, and within the radius of this light, of which it seemed to form a part, she saw distinctly a white figure, like a spirit. The curtains of the window were drawn aside, and all within the room, with the exception of Pierre Lamont, who was left without an audience, peered into the grounds below.

Nothing was to be seen; no glimpse of light or white shadow; no movement but the slight stir of leaf and branch, but the young lady vehemently persisted in her statement, and, questioned more closely, declared that the figure was that of a woman; she had seen her face, her hair, her white robe.

The three persons whom her story most deeply impressed were the Advocate's wife, Christian Almer, and Father Capel. With the Advocate it was a simple delusion of the senses; with Jacob Hartrich, "nerves." Christian Almer and Father Capel went out to search the grounds, and when they returned reported that nothing was to be seen.

During this excitement Pierre Lamont was absolutely unnoticed, and it was not till a groan proceeded from the part of the room where he sat huddled up in the wheeled chair in which he was imprisoned that attention was directed to him. He was evidently in great pain; his features were contracted with the spasms which darted through his limbs.

"It almost masters me," he said to the Advocate, as he laughed and winced, "this physical anguish. I will not allow it to conquer me, but I must humour it. I am tempted to ask you to give me a bed to-night."

"Stop with us by all means," said the Advocate; "the night is too dark, and your house too far, for you to leave while you are suffering."

So it was arranged, and within half an hour all the other guests had taken their departure.

CHAPTER III

THE WATCH ON THE HILL

FOR more than twenty years the House of White Shadows may be said to have been without a history. Its last eventful chapter ended with the death of Christian Almer's father, the tragic story of whose life has been related by Mother Denise. Then followed a blank—a dull uniformity of days and months and years, without the occurrence of a single event worthy of record in the annals of the family who had held the estate for four generations. The doors and windows of the villa were but seldom opened, and on those rare occasions only by Mother Denise, who had too strict a regard for the faithful discharge of her duties to allow the costly furniture to fall into decay. Suddenly all this was altered. Light and life reigned again. Startling was the transformation. Within a few short weeks the House of White Shadows had become the centre of a chain of events, in which the affections which sway and the passions which dominate mankind were displayed in all their strangest variety.

At a short distance from the gate, on this dark night, upon the rise of a hill which commanded a view of the villa, sometimes stood and sometimes lay a man in the prime of life. Not a well-looking man, nor a desirable man, and yet one who in his better days might have passed for a gentleman. Even now, with the aid of fine feathers, he might have reached such a height in the judgment of those who were not given to close observation. His feathers at the present time were anything but fine—a sad fall, for they have been once such as fine birds wear; no barn-door fowl's, but of the part-ridge's quality. So that, between the man and his garments, there was something of an affinity. He was tall and fairly presentable, and he bore himself with a certain air which, in the eyes of the vulgar, would have passed for grace. But his swagger spoilt him; and his sensual

mouth, which had begot a coarseness from long and unrestrained indulgence, spoilt him; and the blotches on his face spoilt him. His hands were white, and rings would have looked well on them, if rings ever looked well on the hands of a man—which may be doubted.

As he stood, or lay, his eyes were for the chief part of his time fixed on the House of White Shadows. Following with precision his line of sight, it would have been discovered that the point which claimed his attention were the windows of the Advocate's study. There was a light in them, but no movement.

"Yet he is there," muttered the man, whose name was John Vanbrugh, "for I see his shadow."

His sight unassisted would not have enabled him to speak with authority upon this, but he held in his hand a field-glass, and he saw by its aid what would otherwise have been hidden from him.

"His guests have gone," continued John Vanbrugh, "and he has time to attend to me. I have that to sell, Edward, which it is worth your while to purchase—nay, which it is vital you should purchase. Every hour's delay increases its price. It must be near midnight, and still no sign. Well, I can wait—I can wait."

He had no watch to take count of the time, which passed slowly; but he waited patiently nevertheless, until the sound of footsteps, approaching in his direction, diverted his attention. They came nearer, nearer, until this other wanderer of the night was close upon him.

"Who," he thought, "has taken it into his head to come my way? This is no time for honest men to be about."

And then he said aloud—for the intruder had paused within a yard of him:

"What particular business brings you here, friend, and why do you not pass on?"

A sigh of intense relief escaped the breast of the newcomer, who was none other than Gautran. With the cuff of his shirt he wiped the perspiration from his forehead, and muttered in a grateful tone:

"A man's voice! That is something to be thankful for."

The sound of this muttering, but not the words, reached Vanbrugh's ears.

"Well, friend?" said Vanbrugh, who, being unarmed, felt himself at a disadvantage.

"Well?" repeated Gautran.

"Are you meditating an attack upon me? I am not worth the risk, upon my honour. If you are poor, behold in me a brother in misfortune. Go to a more profitable market."

"I don't want to hurt you."

"I'll take your word for it. Pass on, then. The way is clear for you."

He stepped aside, and observed that Gautran took step with him instead of from him.

"Are you going to pass on?" asked Gautran.

"Upon my soul this is getting amusing, and I should enjoy it if I were not angry. Am I going to pass on? No, I am not going to pass on."

"Neither am I."

"In the name of all that is mischievous," cried Vanbrugh, "what is it you want?"

"Company," was the answer, "till daylight. That is all. You need not be afraid of me."

"Company!" exclaimed Vanbrugh. "My company?"

"Yours or any man's. Something human—something living. And you must talk to me. I'm not going to be driven mad by silence."

"You are a cool customer, with your this and that. Are you aware that you are robbing me?"

"I don't want to rob you."

"But you are—of solitude. And you appropriate it! No further fooling. Leave me."

"Not till daylight."

"There is something strange in your resolve. Let me have a better look at you."

He laid his hand upon Gautran's shoulder, and the man did not resent the movement. In the evening, when he had arrived in Geneva, he had made an unsuccessful attempt to enter the court-house; therefore, Gautran being otherwise a stranger to him, he did not recognise in the

face of the man he was now looking into, and which he could but dimly see in consequence of the darkness of the night, the prisoner whose trial for murder had caused so great an excitement.

"If I am any judge of human nature," he said, "you are in a bad way. I can see sufficient of you to discern that from a social point of view you are a ruin, a very wreck of respectability, if your lines ever crossed in that direction. In which respect I, who was once a gentleman, and am still, cannot deny that there is something of moral kinship between us. This confers distinction upon you—upon me, a touch of obloquy. But I am old enough not to be squeamish. We must take the world as we find it—a villainous world! What say you?"

"A villainous world! Go on talking."

Vanbrugh stood with his face towards the House of White Shadows, watching for the signal he had asked the Advocate to give him. Gautran, facing the man upon whom he had forced his company, stood, therefore, with his back to the villa, the lights in which he had not yet seen.

"Our condition may be borne," continued Vanbrugh, "with greater or lesser equanimity, so long as we feed the body—the quality of our food being really of no great importance, so far as the tissues are concerned; but when the mind is thrown off its balance, as I see by your eyes is the case with you, the condition of the man becomes serious. What is it you fear?"

"Nothing human."

"Yet you are at war with society."

"I was; but I am a free man now."

"You have been in peril, then—plainly speaking, a gaol-bird. What matters? The world is apt to be too censorious; I find no fault with you for your misfortune. Such things happen to the best of us. But you are free now, you say, and you fear nothing in human shape. What is it, then, you do fear?"

"Were you ever followed by a spirit?" asked Gautran, in a hoarse whisper.

"A moment," said Vanbrugh. "Your question startles me. I have about me two mouthfuls of an elixir with-

out which life would not be worth the living. Share and share alike."

He produced a bottle containing about a quarter of a pint of brandy, and saying, "Your health, friend," put it to his lips.

Gautran watched him greedily, and, when he received the bottle, drained it with a gasp of savage satisfaction.

"That is fine, that is fine!" he said; "I wish there were more of it."

"To echo your wish is the extent of my power in the direction of fulfilment. Now we can continue. Was I ever followed by a spirit? Of what kind?"

"Of a woman," replied Gautran with a shudder.

"Being a spirit, necessarily a dead woman!"

"Aye, a dead woman—one who was murdered."

A look of sudden and newly-awakened intelligence flashed into Vanbrugh's face. He placed his hand again upon Gautran's shoulder.

"A young woman?" he said.

"Aye," responded Gautran.

"Fair and beautiful?"

"Yes."

"Who met her death in the river Rhone?"

"Aye—it is known to all the world."

"One who sold flowers in the streets of Geneva—whose name was Madeline?"

The utterance of the name conjured up the phantom of the murdered girl, and Gautran, with violent shudders, gazed upon the spectre.

"She is there—she is there!" he muttered, in a voice of agony. "Will she never, never leave me?"

These words confirmed Vanbrugh's suspicion. It was Gautran who stood before him.

"Another winning card," he said, in a tone of triumph, and with a strange smile. "The man is guilty, else why should he fear? Vanbrugh, a life of ease is yours once more. Away with these rags, this money-pinch which has nipped you for years. Days of pleasure, of luxury, are yours to enjoy. You step once more into the ranks of gentlemen. What would the great Advocate in yonder

study think of this chance encounter, knowing—what he has yet to learn—that I hold in my hands what he prizes most—his fame and honour?”

Gautran heard the words; he turned, and followed the direction of Vanbrugh's gaze.

“There is but one great Advocate, the man who set me free. He lives yonder, then?”

“You know it, rogue,” replied Vanbrugh. “There are the lights in his study window. Gautran, you and I must be better acquainted.”

But he was compelled to submit to a postponement of his wish, for the next moment he was alone. Gautran had disappeared.

CHAPTER IV

THE SILENT VOICE

ALONE in his study the Advocate had time to review his position. His first feeling, when he listened to Gautran's confession, had been one of unutterable horror, and this feeling was upon him when he entered the villa.

From his outward demeanour no person could have guessed how terrible was his inward agitation. Self-repression was in him a second nature. The habit of concealing his thoughts had been of incalculable value in his profession, and had materially assisted in many of his great victories.

But now he was alone, and when he had locked the study-door, he threw off the mask.

He had been proud of this victory; it was the greatest he had ever achieved. He knew that it would increase his fame, and that it was an important step in the ladder it had been the delight of his life to climb. Cold as he appeared, and apparently indifferent to success, his ambition was vast, overpowering. His one great aim had been not only to achieve the highest distinction while he lived, but to leave behind him a name which should be placed at the head of all his class—a clear and unsullied name which

men in after times would quote as a symbol of the triumph of intellect.

It was the sublimity of egoism, contemptible when allied with intellectual inferiority and weakness of character, but justifiable in his case because it was in association with a force of mental gifts little short of marvellous.

In the exercise of his public duties he had been careful never to take a false step. Before he committed himself to a task he invariably made a study of its minutest detail; conned it over and over, stripped it of its outward coverings, probed it to its very heart, added facets to it which lay not only within the region of probability, but possibility; and the result had been that his triumphs were spoken of with wonderment, as something almost higher than human, and within the capacity of no other man.

It had sometimes occurred that the public voice was against a prisoner whose defence he had undertaken, but it was never raised against himself, and perhaps the sweetest reward which was ever bestowed upon him was when, in an unpopular cause which he had conducted to victory, it was afterwards proved that the man he had championed—whose very name was an offence—was in honest truth a victim instead of a wronger. It had grown into a fashion to say, "He must have right on his side, or the Advocate would not defend him."

Here, then, was a triple alliance of justice, truth, and humanity—and he, their champion and the vindicator and upholder of right. In another sphere of life, and in times when the dragon of oppression was weighing heavily upon a people's liberties, such achievements as his would have caused the champion to be worshipped as a saint—certainly as a hero imbued with kingly qualities.

No man really deserves this altitude, though it be sometimes reached. Human nature is too imperfect, its undercurrents are not sufficiently translucent for truth's face to be reflected as in a crystal. But we judge the deed, not the doer, and the man is frequently crowned, the working of whose inner life, were it laid bare, would shock and disgust.

It was when he was at the height of his fame that the Advocate met Adelaide.

Hitherto he had seen but little of women, or, seeing them, had passed them lightly by, but there comes a time in the lives of most men, even of the greatest, when they are abruptly arrested by an influence which insensibly masters them.

Only once in his life had the Advocate wandered from the path he had formed for himself; but it was an idle wandering, partly prompted by a small and unworthy desire to prove himself of two men, the superior, and he had swiftly and effectually thrown the folly aside, never again to be indulged in or renewed. That was many years ago, and had been long forgotten, when Adelaide appeared to him, a star of loveliness, which proved, what few would have believed, that he had a heart.

The new revelation was to him at first a source of infinite gladness, and he yielded to the enchantment. But after a time he questioned himself as to the wisdom of this infatuation. It was then, however, too late. The spell was upon him, and it did not lay in his power to remove it. And when he found that this sweet pleasure did not—as it would have done with most men—interfere with his active duties, nay, that it seemed to infuse a keener relish into their fulfilment, he asked himself the question, “Why not?” In the simple prompting of the question lay the answer.

He possessed an immense power of concentration. With many subjects claiming close attention he could dismiss them all but the one to which it was necessary he should devote himself, and after much self-communing he satisfied himself that love would be no block to ambition.

And indeed so it proved. Adelaide, dazzled by the attentions of a man who stood so high, accepted his worship, and, warned by friends not to be exigent, made no demands upon his time which interfered with his duties.

He was a devoted but not a passionate lover. On all sides she was congratulated—it gratified her. By many she was envied—it delighted her; and she took pleasure in showing how easily she could lead this man, who to all other women was cold as ice.

In those days it was out of her own vanity and thirst

for conquest that she evolved pleasure from the association of her name with his. After their marriage he strove to interest her in the cases upon which he was engaged, but, discovering that her taste did not lie in that direction, he did not persist in his endeavour. It did not lessen his love for her, nor her hold upon him. She was to him on this night as she had ever been, a sweet, affectionate, pure woman, who gave him as much love and honour as a man so much older than herself could reasonably expect.

Something of what has been here expressed passed through his mind as he reflected upon the events of the day. How should he deal with Gautran's confession? That was the point he debated.

When he undertook the defence he had a firm belief in the man's innocence. He had drawn the picture of Gautran exactly as he had conceived it. Vile, degraded, brutal, without a redeeming feature—but not the murderer of Madeline the flower-girl.

He reviewed the case again carefully, to see whether he could have arrived at any other conclusion. He could not perceive a single defect in his theory. He was justified in his own eyes. He knew that the entire public sentiment was against him, and that he had convinced men against their will. He knew that there was imported into this matter a feeling of resentment at his successful efforts to set Gautran free. What, then, had induced him to come forward voluntarily in defence of this monster? He asked the question of himself aloud, and he answered it aloud: A reverence for justice.

He had not indulged in self-deception when he declared to Gautran's judges that the leading principle of his life had been a desire for justice in small matters as well as great, for the meanest equally with the loftiest of his fellow-creatures. That it did not clash with his ambition was his good fortune. It was not tainted because of this human coincidence. So far, then, he was justified in his own estimation.

But he must be justified also in the eyes of the world. And here intruded the torturing doubt whether this were possible. If he made it known to the world that Gautran was guilty, the answer would be:

"We know it, and knew it, as we believe you yourself did while you were working to set him free. Why did you prevent justice being done upon a murderer?"

"But I believed him innocent," he would say. "Only now do I know him to be guilty!"

"Upon what grounds?" would be asked.

"Upon Gautran's own confession, given to me, alone, on a lonely road, within an hour after the delivery of the verdict."

He saw the incredulous looks with which this would be received. He put himself in the place of the public, and he asked:

"Why, at such a time, in such a spot, did Gautran confess to you? What motive had he? You are not a priest, and the high road is not a confessional."

He could supply to this question no answer which common-sense would accept.

And say that Gautran were questioned, as he would assuredly be. He would deny the statement point-blank. Liberty is sweet to all men.

Then it would be one man's statement against another's; he would be on an equality with Gautran, reduced to his level; and in the judgment of numbers of people Gautran would have the advantage over him. Sides would be taken; he himself, in a certain sense, would be placed upon his trial, and public resentment, which now was smothered and would soon be quite hushed, would break out against him.

Was he strong enough to withstand this? Could he arrest the furious torrent and stand unwounded on the shore, pure and scatheless in the eyes of men?

He doubted. He was too profound a student of human nature not to know that his fair fame would be blotted, and that there would be a stain upon his reputation which would cling to him to the last day of his life.

Still he questioned himself. Should he dare it, and brave it, and bow his head? Who humbles himself lays himself open to the blow—and men are not merciful when the chance is offered to them. But he would stand clear in his own eyes; his conscience would approve. To none but himself would this be known. Inward approval

would be his sole reward, his sole compensation. A hero's work, however.

For a moment or two he glowed at the contemplation. He soon cooled down, and with a smile, partly of self-pity, partly of self-contempt, proceeded to the calmer consideration of the matter.

The meaner qualities came into play. The world did not know; what reason was there that it should be enlightened—that he should enlighten it, to his own injury? The secret belonged to two men—to himself and Gautran. It was not likely that Gautran would blurt it out to others; he valued his liberty too highly. So that it was as safe as though it were buried in a deep grave. As for the wrong done, it was a silent wrong. To ruin one's self for a sentiment would be madness; no one really suffered.

The unfortunate girl was at rest. She was a stranger; no person knew her, or was interested in her except for her beauty; she left no family, no father, mother, or sisters, to mourn her cruel death.

There was certainly the woman spoken of as Pauline, but she had disappeared, and was probably in no way related to Madeline. What more likely than that the elder woman's association with the younger arose out of a desire to trade upon the girl's beauty, and appropriate the profits to her own use? A base view of the matter, but natural, human. And having reaped a certain profit out of their trade in flowers, larger than was suspected, the crafty woman of the world had deliberately deserted Madeline and left her to her fate.

Why, then, should he step forward as her avenger, to the destruction of the great name he had spent the best fruits of his mind and the best years of his life to build up? To think of such a thing was Quixotism run mad.

One of the threads of these reflections—that which forced itself upon him as the toughest and the most prominent—was contempt of himself for permitting his thoughts to wander into currents so base. But that was his concern; it affected no other person, so long as he chose to hold his own counsel. The difficulty into which he was plunged was not of his seeking. Fate had dealt him a hard stroke; he received it on his shield instead of on his

body. Who would say that that was not wise? What other man, having the option, would not have done as he was about to do?

"Cunning sophist, cunning sophist!" his conscience whispered to him; "think not that, wandering in these crooked paths of reasoning, you can find the talisman which will transform wrong into right, or remove the stain which will rest upon your soul."

He answered his conscience: "To none but myself is my soul visible. Who, then, can see the stain?"

His conscience replied: "God!"

"I will confess to Him," he said, "but not to man."

"There is but one right course," his conscience said; "juggle as you may, you know that there is but one right course."

"I know it," he said boldly, "but I am cast in human mould, and am not heroic enough for the sacrifice you would impose upon me."

"Listen," said his conscience, "a voice from the grave is calling to you."

He heard the voice: "BLOOD FOR BLOOD."

He stood transfixed. The images raised by that silent voice were appalling. They culminated in the impalpable shape of a girl, with pallid face, gazing sadly at him, over whose form seemed to be traced in the air the lurid words, "BLOOD FOR BLOOD!"

Heaven's decree.

The vision lasted but for a brief space. In the light of his strong will such airy terrors could not long exist.

Blood for blood! It once held undisputed sway, but there are great and good men who look upon the fulfilment of the stern decree as a crime. Mercy, humanity, and all the higher laws of civilisation were on their side. But he could not quite stifle the voice.

He took another view. Say that he yielded to the whisperings of his conscience—say that, braving all the consequences of his action, he denounced Gautran. The man had already been tried for murder, and could not be tried again. Set this aside. Say that a way was discovered to bring Gautran again to the bar of earthly justice, of what value was the new evidence that could be brought against

him? His own bare word—his recital of an interview of which he held no proof, and which Gautran's simple denial would be sufficient to destroy. Place this new evidence against the evidence he himself had established in proof of Gautran's innocence, and it became a feather-weight. A lawyer of mediocre attainments would blow away such evidence with a breath. It would injure only him who brought it forward.

He decided. The matter must rest where it was. In silence lay safety.

There was still another argument in favour of this conclusion. The time for making public the horrible knowledge of which he had become possessed was passed. After he had received Gautran's confession he should not have lost a moment in communicating with the authorities. Not only had he allowed the hours to slip by without taking action, but in the conversation initiated that evening by Pierre Lamont, in which he had joined, he had tacitly committed himself to the continuance of a belief in Gautran's innocence. He saw no way out of the fatal construction which all who knew him, as well as all who knew him not, would place upon this line of conduct. He had been caught in a trap of his own setting, but he could hide his wounds. Yes; the question was answered. He must preserve silence.

This long self-communing had exhausted him. He could not sleep; he could neither read nor study. His mind required relief and solace in companionship. His wife was doubtless asleep; he would not disturb her. He would go to his friend's chamber; Christian Almer would be awake, and they would pass an hour in sympathising converse. Almer had asked him, when they bade each other good-night, whether he intended immediately to retire to rest, and he had answered that he had much to do in his study, and should probably be up till late in the night.

"I will not disturb you," Almer had said, "but I, too, am in no mood for sleep. I have letters to write, and if you happen to need society, come to my room, and we will have one of our old chats."

As he quitted the study to seek his friend the soft sil-

very chimes of a clock on the mantel proclaimed the hour. He counted the strokes. It was midnight.

CHAPTER V

GAUTRAN FINDS A REFUGE

WHEN John Vanbrugh found himself alone he cried:

“What! Tired of my company already? That is a fine compliment to pay to a gentleman of my breeding. Gautran! Gautran!”

He listened; no answer came.

“A capital disappearance,” he continued; “in its way dramatic. The scene, the time, all agreeing. It does not please me. Do you hear me, Gautran,” he shouted. “It does not please me. If I were not tied to this spot in the execution of a most important mission, I would after you, my friend, and teach you better manners. He drank my brandy, too, the ungrateful rogue. A waste of good liquor—a sheer waste! He gets no more without paying its equivalent.”

Vanbrugh indulged in this soliloquy without allowing his wrath to interfere with his watch; not for a single moment did he shift his gaze from the windows of the Advocate’s study.

“Now what induced him,” he said after a pause, “to spirit himself away so mysteriously? From the violent fancy he expressed for my company I regarded him as a fixture; one would have supposed he intended to stick to me like a limpet to a rock. Suddenly, without rhyme or reason, and just as the conversation was getting interesting, he takes French leave, and makes himself scarce.

“I hope he has not left his ghost behind him—the ghost of pretty Madeline. Not likely, though. When a partnership such as that is entered into—uncommonly unpleasant and inconvenient it must be—it is not dissolved so easily.

“Perhaps he was spirited away—wanted, after the fashion of our dear Lothario, Don Giovanni. There was

no blue fire about, however, and I smell no brimstone. No—he disappeared of his own prompting; it will repay thinking over. He saw his phantom—even my presence could not keep her from him. He murdered her—not a doubt of it—and the Advocate has proved his innocence.

“Were it not a double tragedy I should feel disposed to laugh.

“We were speaking of the Advocate when he darted off. But you cannot escape me, Gautran; we shall meet again. An acquaintanceship so happily commenced must not be allowed to drop—nor shall it, while it suits my purpose.

“At length, John Vanbrugh, you are learning to be wise. You allowed yourself to be fleeced, sucked dry, and being thrown upon the rocks, stripped of fortune and the means to woo it, you strove to live as knaves live, upon the folly of others like yourself. But you were a poor hand at the trade; you were never cut out for a knave, and you passed through a succession of reverses so hard as almost to break an honest man’s heart. It is all over now. I see the sun; bright days are before you, John, the old days over again; but you will spend your money more prudently, my lad; no squandering; exact its value; be wise, bold, determined, and you shall not go down with sorrow to the grave. Edward, my friend, if I had the liquor I would drink to you. As it is——”

As it was, he wafted a mocking kiss towards the House of White Shadows, and patiently continued his watch.

Meanwhile Gautran had not been idle.

Upon quitting Vanbrugh, the direction he took was from the House of White Shadows, but when he was at a safe distance from Vanbrugh, out of sight and hearing, he paused, and deliberately set his face towards the villa.

He skirted the hill at its base, and walking with great caution, pausing frequently to assure himself that he was alone and was not being followed, arrived at the gates of the villa. He tried the gates—they were locked. Could he climb over them? He would have risked the danger—they were set with sharp spikes—had he not known that it would take some time, and feared that some person passing along the high road might detect him.

He made his way to the back of the villa, and carefully examined the walls. His eyes were accustomed to darkness, and he could see pretty clearly; it was a long time before he discovered a means of ingress, afforded by an old elm which grew within a few yards of the wall, and the far-spreading branches of which stretched over the grounds.

He climbed the tree, and crept like a cat along the stoutest branch he could find. It bent beneath his weight as he hung suspended from it. It was a fall of twenty feet, but he risked it. He unloosed his hands, and dropped to the earth. He was shaken, but not bruised. His purpose, thus far, was accomplished. He was within the grounds of the villa.

All was quiet. When he had recovered from the shock of the fall, he stepped warily towards the house. Now and then he was startled and alarmed at the shadows of the trees which moved athwart his path, but he mastered these terrors, and crept on and on till he heard the soft sound of a clock striking the hour.

He paused, as the Advocate had done, and counted the strokes. Midnight. When the sound had quite died away, he stepped forward, and saw the lights in the study windows.

Was anybody there? He guessed shrewdly enough that if the room was occupied it would be by no other person than the Advocate. Well, it was the Advocate he came to see; he had no design of robbery in his mind.

He stealthily approached a window, and blessed his good fortune to find that it was partly open. He peered into the study; it was empty. He climbed the sill, and dropped safely into the room.

What a grand apartment! What costly pictures and vases, what an array of books and papers! Beautiful objects met his eyes whichever way he turned. There was the Advocate's chair, there the table at which he wrote. The Advocate had left the room for a while—this was Gautran's correct surmise—and intended to return. The lamps fully turned up were proof of this. He looked at the papers on the table. Could he have read, he would have seen that many of them bore his own

name. On a massive sideboard there were bottles filled with liquor, and glasses. He drank three or four glasses rapidly, and then, coiling himself up in a corner of the room, in a few moments was fast asleep.

CHAPTER VI

PIERRE LAMONT READS LOVE-VERSES TO FRITZ
THE FOOL

THE bedroom allotted to Pierre Lamont by Mother Denise was situated on the first floor, and adjoined the apartments prepared for Christian Almer. As he was unable to walk a step it was necessary that the old lawyer should be carried upstairs. His body-servant, expressly engaged to wheel him about and attend to his wants, was ready to perform his duties, but into Pierre Lamont's head had entered the whim that he would be assisted to his room by no person but Fritz the Fool. The servant was sent in search of Fritz, who could not easily be found. It was quite half an hour before the fool made his appearance, and by that time all the guests, with the exception of Pierre Lamont, had left the House of White Shadows.

Out of sympathy with Pierre Lamont's sufferings Father Capel had remained to chat with him until Fritz arrived. But the priest was suddenly called away. Mother Denise, entering the room, informed him that a peasant who lived ten miles from the House of White Shadows urgently desired to see him. Father Capel was about to go out to the man, when Adelaide suggested that he should be brought in, and the peasant accordingly disclosed his errand in the presence of the Advocate and his wife, Pierre Lamont, and Christian Almer.

"I have been to your house," said the peasant, standing, cap in hand, in humble admiration of the grandeur by which he was surrounded, "and was directed here. There is a woman dying in my hut."

"What is her name, and where does she come from?"

"I know not. She has been with us for over three weeks, and it is a sore burden upon us. It happened in this way, reverend father. My hut, you know, is in the cleft of a rock, at the foot of the Burger Pass, a dangerous spot for those who are not familiar with the track. Some twenty-four days ago it was that my wife in the night roused me with the tale of a frightful scream, which, proceeding from one in agony near my hut, pierced her very marrow, and woke her from sleep. I sprang from my bed, and went into the open, and a few yards down I found a woman who had fallen from a height, and was lying in delirious pain upon the sharp stones. I raised her in my arms; she was bleeding terribly, and I feared she was hurt to death. I did the best I could, and carried her into my hut, where my wife nursed and tended her. But from that night to this we have been unable to get one sensible word from her, and she is now at death's door. She needs your priestly offices, reverend father, and therefore I have come for you."

"How interesting!" exclaimed Adelaide. "Who will pay you for your goodness to this poor creature?"

"God," said Father Capel, replying for the peasant. "It is the poor who help the poor, and in the Kingdom of Heaven our Gracious Lord rewards them."

"I am content," said the peasant.

"But in the contemplation of the Hereafter," said Pierre Lamont, "let us not forget the present. There are many whose loads are too heavy—for instance, asses. There are a few whose loads are too light—scoffers, like myself. You have had occasion to rebuke me, this night, Father Capel, and were I not a hardened sinner I should be groaning in tribulation. That to the last hour of my life I shall deserve your rebukes, proves me, I fear, beyond hope of redemption. Still I bear in mind the asses' burden. You have used my purse once, in penance; use it again, and pay this man for the loss inflicted upon him by his endeavours to earn the great spiritual reward—which, in all humility I say it, does not put bread into human stomachs."

Father Capel accepted Pierre Lamont's purse, and said: "I judge not by words, but by works; your offering shall

be justly administered. Come, let us hasten to this unfortunate woman."

When he and the peasant had departed, Pierre Lamont said, with mock enthusiasm:

"A good man! a good man! Virtue such as his is a severe burden, but I doubt not he enjoys it. I prefer to earn my seat in heaven vicariously, to which end my gold will materially assist. It is as though paradise can be bought by weight or measure; the longer the purse the greater the chance of salvation. Ah, here is Fritz. Good-night, good-night. Bright dreams to all. Gently, Fritz, gently," continued the old lawyer, as he was being carried up the stairs, "my bones are brittle."

"Brittle enough I should say," rejoined Fritz; "chicken bones they might be from the weight of you."

"Are diamonds heavy, fool?"

"Ha, ha!" laughed Fritz, "if I had the selling of you, Master Lamont, I should like to make you the valuer. I should get a rare good price for you at that rate."

In the bedroom Pierre Lamont retained Fritz to prepare him for bed. The old lawyer, undressed, was a veritable skeleton; there was not an ounce of superfluous flesh on his shrivelled bones.

"What would you have done in the age of giants?" asked Fritz, making merry over Pierre Lamont's attenuated form.

"This would have served," replied Pierre Lamont, tapping his forehead with his forefinger. "I should have contrived so as to be a match for them. Bring that small table close to the bedside. Now place the lamp on it. Put your hand into the tail-pocket of my coat; you will find a silk handkerchief there."

He tied the handkerchief—the colour of which was yellow—about his head; and as the small, thin face peeped out of it, brown-skinned and hairless, it looked like the face of a mummy.

Fritz gazed at him, and laughed immoderately, and Pierre Lamont nodded and nodded at the fool, with a smile of much humour on his lips.

"Enjoy yourself, fool, enjoy yourself," he said kindly; "but don't pass your life in laughter; it is destructive of

brain power. What do you think of the spirit, Fritz, the appearance of which so alarmed one of the young ladies in our merry party to-night?"

"What do *you* think of it?" asked Fritz in return, with a quivering of his right eyelid, which suspiciously resembled a wink.

"Ah, ah, knave!" cried Pierre Lamont, chuckling. "I half suspected you."

"You will not tell on me, Master Lamont?"

"Not I, fool. How did you contrive it?"

"With a white sheet and a lantern. I thought it a pity that my lady should be disappointed. Should she leave the place without some warranty that spirits are here, the house would lose its character. Then there is the young master, your Christian Almer. He spoke to me very much as if I were a beast of the field instead of a—fool. So I thought I would give him food for thought."

"A dangerous trick, Fritz. Your secret is safe with me, but I would not try it too often. Are there any books in the room? Look about, Fritz, look about."

"For books!" exclaimed Fritz. "People go to bed to sleep."

"I go to bed to think," retorted Pierre Lamont, "and read. People are idiots—they don't know how to use the nights."

"Men are not owls," said Fritz. "There are no books in the room."

"How shall I pass the night?" grumbled Pierre Lamont. "Open that drawer; there may be something to read in it."

Fritz opened the drawer; it was filled with books. Pierre Lamont uttered a cry of delight.

"Bring half-a-dozen of them—quick. Now I am happy."

He opened the books which Fritz handed to him, and placed them by his side on the bed. They were in various languages. Lavater, Zimmermann, a Latin book on Demonology, poems of Lope da Vega, Klingemann's tragedies, Italian poems by Zappi, Filicaja, Cassiani, and others.

"You understand all these books, Master Lamont?"

"Of course, fool."

"What language is this?"

"Latin."

"And this?"

"Spanish."

"And this?"

"Italian. No common mind collected these books, Fritz."

"The master that's dead—father of him who sleeps in the next room."

"Ha, ha!" interposed Pierre Lamont, turning over the pages as he spoke. "He sleeps there, does he?"

"Yes. His father was a great scholar, I've heard."

"A various scholar, Fritz, if these books are an epitome of his mind. Love, philosophy, gloomy wanderings in dark paths—here we have them all. The lights and shadows of life. Which way runs your taste, fool?"

"I love the light, of course. What use in being a fool if you don't know how to take advantage of your opportunities?"

"Well said. Let us indulge a little. These poets are sly rascals. They take unconscionable liberties, and play with women's beauty as other men dare not do."

Fritz's eyes twinkled.

"It does not escape even you, Master Lamont."

"What does not escape me, fool?"

"Woman's beauty, Master Lamont."

"Have I not eyes in my head and blood in my veins?" asked Pierre Lamont. "It warms me like wine to know that I and the loveliest woman for a hundred miles round are caged within the same roof."

Fritz indulged in another fit of laughter, and then exclaimed:

"She has caught you too, eh? Now, who would have thought it? Two of the cleverest lawyers in the world fixed with one arrow! Beauty is a divine gift, Master Lamont. To possess it is almost as good as being born a fool."

"I shall lie awake and read love-verses. Listen to Zappi, fool."

And in a voice really tender, Pierre Lamont read from the book:

"A hundred pretty little loves, in fun,
Were romping; laughing, rioting one day."

"A hundred!" cried Fritz, chuckling and rubbing his hands. "A hundred—pretty—little loves! If Father Capel were to hear you, his face would grow as long as my arm."

"Wrong, Fritz, wrong. His face would beam, and he would listen for the continuation of the poem."

And Pierre Lamont resumed:

" 'Let's fly a little now,' said one, 'I pray.'
'Whither?' 'To beauty's face.' 'Agreed—'tis done.'

"Faster than bees to flowers they wing their way
To lovely maids—to mine, the sweetest one;
And to her hair and panting lips they run—
Now here, now there, now everywhere they stray.

"My love so full of loves—delightful sight!
Two with their torches in her eyes, and two
Upon her eyelids with their bows alight."

"You read rarely, Master Lamont," said Fritz. "It is true, is it not, that, when you were in practice, you were called the lawyer with the silver tongue?"

"It has been said of me, Fritz."

The picture of this withered, dried-up old lawyer, sitting up in bed, with a yellow handkerchief for a night-cap tied round his head, reading languishing verses in a tender voice, and striving to bring into his weazened features an expression in harmony with them, was truly a comical one.

"Why, Master Lamont," said Fritz in admiration, "you were cut out for a gallant. Had you recited those lines in the drawing-room, you would have had all the ladies at your feet—supposing," he added, with a broad grin, "they had all been blind."

"Ah me!" said Pierre Lamont, throwing aside the book with a mocking sigh. "Too old—too old!"

"And shrunken," said Fritz.

"It is not to be denied, Fritz. And shrunken."

"And ugly."

"You stick daggers into me. Yes—and ugly. Ah!" and with simulated wrath he shook his fist in the air, "if I

were but like my brother the Advocate! Eh, Fritz—eh?”

Fritz shook his head slowly.

“If I were not a fool, I should say I would much rather be as you are, old, and withered, and ugly, and a cripple, than be standing in the place of your brother the Advocate. And so would you, Master Lamont, for all your love-songs.”

“I can teach you nothing, fool. Push the lamp a little nearer to me. Give me my waistcoat. Here is a gold piece for you. I owe you as much, I think. We will keep our own counsel, Fritz. Good-night.”

“Good-night, Master Lamont. I am sorry that trial is over. It was rare fun!”

CHAPTER VII

MISTRESS AND MAID

“**D**IONETTA?”

“Yes, my lady.”

The maid and her mistress were in Adelaide's dressing-room, and Dionetta was brushing her lady's hair, which hung down in rich, heavy waves.

She smiled at herself in the glass before which she was sitting, and her mood became more joyous as she noted the whiteness of her teeth and the beautiful expression of her mouth when she smiled. There was an irresistible fascination in her smile; it flashed into all her features, like a laughing sunrise.

She was never tired of admiring her beauty; it was to her a most precious possession of which nothing but time could rob her. “To-day is mine,” she frequently said to herself, and she wished with all her heart that there were no to-morrow.

Yes, to-day was hers, and she was beautiful, and, gazing at the reflection of her fair self, she thought that she did not look more than eighteen.

“Do you think I do, child?” she asked of Dionetta.

“Think you do what, my lady?” inquired Dionetta.

Adelaide laughed, a musical, child-like laugh which any man, hearing, would have judged to be an expression of pure innocent delight. She derived pleasure even from this pleasant sound.

"I was thinking to myself, and I believed I was speaking aloud. Do you think I look twenty-five?"

"No, indeed, my lady, not by many years. You look younger than I do."

"And you are not eighteen, Dionetta."

"Not yet, my lady."

Adelaide's eyes sparkled. It was indeed true that she looked younger than her maid, who was in herself a beauty and young-looking.

"Dionetta," she said, presently, after a pause, "I have had a curious dream."

"I saw you close your eyes for a moment, my lady."

"I dreamt I was the most beautiful woman in all this wide world."

"You are, my lady."

The words were uttered in perfect honesty and simplicity. Her mistress was truly the most beautiful woman she had ever seen.

"Nonsense, child, nonsense—there are others as fair, although I should not fear to stand beside them. It was only a dream, and this but the commencement of it. I was the most beautiful woman in the world. I had the handsomest features, the loveliest figure, and a shape that sculptors would have called perfection. I had the most exquisite dresses that ever were worn, and everything in that way a woman's heart could desire."

"A happy dream, my lady!"

"Wait. I had a palace to live in, in a land where it was summer the whole year through. Such gardens, Dionetta, and such flowers as one only sees in dreams. I had rings enough to cover my fingers a dozen times over; diamonds in profusion for my hair, and neck, and arms,—trunks full of them, and of old lace, and of the most wonderful jewels the mind can conceive. Would you believe it, child, in spite of all this, I was the most miserable woman in the universe?"

"It is hard to believe, my lady."

"Not when I tell you the reason. Dionetta, I was absolutely alone. There was not a single person near me, old or young—not one to look at me, to envy me, to admire me, to love me. What was the use of beauty, diamonds, flowers, dresses? The brightest eyes, the loveliest complexion, the whitest skin—all were thrown away. It would have been just as well if I had been dressed in rags, and were old and wrinkled as Pierre Lamont. Now, what I learn from my dream is this—that beauty is not worth having unless it is admired and loved, and unless other people can see it as well as yourself."

"Everybody sees that you are beautiful, my lady; it is spoken of everywhere."

"Is it, Dionetta, really, now, is it?"

"Yes, my lady. And you are admired and loved."

"I think I am, child; I know I am. So that my dream goes for nothing. A foolish fancy, was it not, Dionetta?—but women are never satisfied. I should never be tired—never, never, of hearing the man I love say, 'I love you, I love you! You are the most beautiful, the dearest, the sweetest!'"

She leant forward and looked closely at herself in the glass, and then sank back in her chair and smiled, and half-closed her eyes.

"Dionetta," she said presently, "what makes you so pale?"

"It is the Shadow, my lady, that was seen to-night," replied Dionetta in a whisper; "I cannot get it out of my mind."

"But you did not see it?"

"No, my lady; but it was there."

"You believe in ghosts?"

"Yes, my lady."

"You would not have the courage to go where one was to be seen?"

"Not for all the gold in the world, my lady."

"But the other servants are more courageous?"

"They may be, but they would not dare to go; they said so to-night, all of them."

"They have been speaking of it, then?"

"Oh, yes; of scarcely anything else. Grandmother said

to-night that if you had not come to the villa, the belief in the shadows would have died away altogether."

"That is too ridiculous," interrupted Adelaide. "What can I have to do with them?"

"If you had not come," said Dionetta, "grandmother said our young master would not be here. It is because he is in the house, sleeping here for the first night for so many, many years, that the spirit of his mother appeared to him."

"But your grandmother has told me she did not believe in the shadows."

"My lady, I think she is changing her opinion—else she would never have said what she did. It is long since I have seen her so disturbed."

Adelaide rose from her chair, the fairest picture of womanhood eyes ever gazed upon. A picture an artist would have contemplated with delight. She stood still for a few moments, her hand resting on her writing-desk.

"Your grandmother does not like me, Dionetta."

"She has not said so, my lady," said Dionetta after an awkward pause.

"Not directly, child," said Adelaide, "and I have no reason to complain of want of respect in her. But one always knows whether one is really liked or not."

"She is growing old," murmured Dionetta apologetically, "and has seen very little of ladies."

"Neither have you, child. Yet you do not dislike me."

"My lady, if I dare to say it, I love you."

"There is no daring in it, child. I love to be loved—and I would sooner be loved by the young than the old. Come here, pretty one. Your ears are like little pink shells, and deserve something better than those common rings in them. Put these in their place."

She took from a jewel-case a pair of earrings, turquoise and small diamonds, and with her own hands made the exchange.

"Oh, my lady," sighed Dionetta with a rose-light in her face. "They are too grand for me! What shall I say when people see them?"

The girl's heart was beating quick with ecstasy. She looked at herself in the glass, and uttered a cry of joy.

"Say that I gave them to you because I love you. I never had a maid who pleased me half as much. Does this prove it?" and she put her lips to Dionetta's face. The girl's eyes filled with tears, and she kissed Adelaide's hand in a passion of gratitude.

"I love you, Dionetta, because you love me, and because I can trust you."

"You can, my lady. I will serve you with all my heart and soul. But I have done nothing for you that any other girl could not have done."

"Would you like to do something for me that I would trust no other to do?"

"Yes, my lady," eagerly answered Dionetta. "I should be proud."

"And you will tell no one?"

"Not a soul, my lady, if you command me."

"I do command you. It is easy to do—merely to deliver a note, and to say: 'This is from my mistress.'"

"Oh, my lady, that is no task at all. It is so simple."

"Simple as it is, I do not wish even your grandmother to hear of it."

"She shall not—nor any person. I swear it."

In the extravagance of her gratitude and joy, she kissed a little cross that hung from her neck.

"You have made me your friend for life," said Adelaide, "the best friend you ever had, or ever will have."

She sat down to her desk, and on a sheet of note-paper wrote these words:

"DEAR CHRISTAN:

"I cannot sleep until I wish you good-night, with no horrid people around us. Let me see you for one minute only.

"ADELAIDE."

Placing the sheet of note-paper in an envelope, she gave it to Dionetta, saying:

"Take this to Mr. Almer's room, and give it to him. It is nothing of any importance, but he will be pleased to receive it."

Dionetta, marvelling why her lady should place any

value upon so slight a service, went upstairs with the note, and returned with the information that Christian Almer was not in his room.

"But his door is open, my lady," she said, "and the lamps are burning."

"Go then, again," said Adelaide, "and place the note on his desk. There is no harm, child; he cannot see you, as he is not there, and if he were, he would not be angry."

Dionetta obeyed without fear, and when she told her mistress that the note was placed where Christian Almer was sure to see it, Adelaide kissed her again, and wished her "Good-night."

CHAPTER VIII

IN THE HOME OF HIS CHILDHOOD

UPON no person had the supposed appearance of a phantom in the grounds of the House of White Shadows produced so profound an impression as upon Christian Almer. This was but natural. Even supposing him not to have been a man of susceptibility, the young lady's terror, as she gazed at the shadow, could not have failed to make an impression upon him.

It was the first night of his return, after an absence of many years, to the house in which he had been born and had passed his unhappy childhood's life: and the origin of the belief in these white shadows which were said to haunt his estate was so closely woven into his personal history as almost to form a part of himself. He had never submitted his mind to a rigid test of belief or disbelief in these signs; one of the principal aims of his life had been, not only to avoid the villa, but to shut out all thought of the tragic events which had led to the death of his parents.

He loved them both with an equal love. When he thought of his mother he saw a woman patient in suffering, of a temper exquisitely sweet, whose every word and act towards her child was fraught with tenderness. When he thought of his father he saw a man high-principled and just, inflexible in matters of right and con-

science, patient also in suffering, and bearing in silence, as his mother did, a grief which had poisoned his life and hers.

Neither of his parents had ever spoken a word against the other; the mystery which kept this tender, loving woman, and this just, high-principled man, apart, was never disclosed to their child. On this subject they entrenched themselves behind a barrier of silence which the child's love and winning ways could not penetrate. Only when his mother's eyes were closed and her lips sealed by death was he privileged to witness how deeply his father had loved her.

Much of what had been disclosed to the Advocate's wife by Mother Denise was absolutely unknown to him. Doubtless he could have learned every particular of the circumstances which had led to the separation of his parents, had his wish lain in that direction; but a delicate instinct whispered to him not to lift the veil, and he would permit no person to approach the subject in his presence.

The bright appearance of his sitting-room cheered him when he entered it, after bidding the Advocate good-night. But this pleasurable sense was not unalloyed. His heart and his conscience were disturbed, and as he took up a handful of roses which had been thrown loose into a bowl and inhaled their fragrance, a guilty thrill shot through his veins.

With the roses in his hand he stood before the picture of Adelaide, which she had hung above his desk. How bright and beautiful was the face, how lovely the smile with which she greeted him! It was almost as if she were speaking to him, telling him that she loved him, and asking him to assure her once more that her love was returned.

For a moment the fancy came upon him that Adelaide and he were like two stars wandering through a dark and dangerous path, and that before them lay death, and worse than death—dishonour and irretrievable ruin; and that she, the brighter star, holding him tightly by the hand, was whispering:

“I will guide you safely; only love me!”

There was one means of escape—death! A coward's

refuge, which might not even afford him a release from dishonour, for Adelaide in her despair might let their secret escape her.

Why, then, should he torture himself unnecessarily? It was not in his power to avert the inevitable. He had not deliberately chosen his course. Fate had driven him into it. Was it not best, after all, to do as he had said to the Advocate that night, to submit without a struggle? Men were not masters, but slaves.

When the image of the Advocate, of his friend, presented itself to him, he thrust it sadly from him. But it came again and again, like the ghost of Banquo; conscience refused to be tricked.

Crumbling the roses in his hand, and strewing the floor with the leaves, he turned, and saw, gazing wistfully at him, the eyes of his mother.

The artist who had painted her picture had not chosen to depict her in her most joyous mood. In *his* heart also, as she sat before him, love's fever was burning, and he knew, while his brush was fixing her beauty on the canvas, that his love was returned, though treachery had parted them. He had striven, not unsuccessfully, to portray in her features the expression of one who loved and to whom love was denied. The look in her eyes was wistful rather than hopeless, and conveyed, to those who knew her history, the idea of one who hoped to find in another world the happiness she had lost in this.

Sad and tender reminiscences of the years he had lived with his mother in these very rooms stole into Christian Almer's mind, and he allowed his thoughts to dwell upon the question, "Why had she been unhappy?" She was young, beautiful, amiable, rich; her husband was a man honoured and esteemed, with a character above reproach. What secret would be revealed if the heart of this mystery were laid bare to his sight? If it were in his power to ascertain the truth, might not the revelation cause him additional sorrow? Better, then, to let the matter rest. No good purpose could be served by raking up the ashes of a melancholy past. His parents were dead——

And here occurred a sudden revulsion. His mother was dead—and, but a few short minutes since, her spirit

was supposed to have appeared in the grounds of the villa. Almost upon the thought, he hurriedly left the room, and made his way into the gardens.

“My neighbour, and master of this house,” said Pierre Lamont, who was lying wide awake in the adjoining room, “does not seem inclined to rest. Something disturbs him.”

Pierre Lamont was alone; Fritz the Fool had left him for the night, and the old lawyer, himself in no mood for sleep, was reading and listening to the movements around him. There was little to hear, only an occasional muffled sound which the listener interpreted as best he could; but Christian Almer, when he left his room, had to pass Pierre Lamont’s door in his progress to the grounds, and it was the clearer sound of his footsteps which led Pierre Lamont to his correct conclusion.

“He is going out of the house,” continued Pierre Lamont. “For what? To look for his mother’s ghost, perhaps. Fool Fritz, in raising this particular ghost, did not foresee what it might lead to. Ghosts! And fools still live who believe in them! Well, well, but for the world’s delusions there would be little work for busy minds to accomplish. As a fantastic piece of imagery I might conjure up an army of men sweeping the world with brooms made of brains—of knavery, folly, trickery, and delusion. What is that? A footstep! Human? No. Too light for any but the feet of a cat!”

But here Pierre Lamont was at fault. It was Dionetta who passed his door in the passage, conveying to Christian Almer’s room the note written by the Advocate’s wife. Before the arrival of her new mistress, Dionetta had always worn thick boots, and the sound of her footstep was plain to hear; but Adelaide’s nerves could not endure the creaking and clattering, and she had supplied her maid with shoes. Besides, Dionetta had naturally a light step.

Christian Almer met with nothing in the grounds to disturb him. No airy shadow appeared to warn him of the danger which threatened him. Were it possible for the spirits of the dead to make themselves seen and heard,

assuredly the spirit of his mother would have appeared and implored him to fly from the house without delay. Happy for him would it have been were he one of the credulous fools Pierre Lamont held in despidal—happy for him could he have formed, out of the shadows which moved around him, a spirit in which he would have believed, and could he have heard, in the sighing of the breeze, a voice which would have impressed him with a true sense of the peril in which he stood.

But he heard and saw nothing for which he could not naturally account, and within a few minutes of midnight he re-entered his room.

“My neighbour has returned,” said Pierre Lamont, “after his nocturnal ramble in search of the spirit of his dead mother. Hark! That sound again! As of some living thing stepping cautiously on the boards. If I were not a cripple I would satisfy myself whether this villa is tormented by restless cats as well as haunted by unholy spirits. When will science supply mankind with the means of seeing, as well as hearing, what is transpiring on the other side of stone and wooden walls?

“Ah, that door of his is creaking. It opens—shuts. I hear a murmur of voices, but cannot catch a word. Almer’s voice of course—and the Advocate’s. No—the other voice and the soft footsteps are in partnership. Not the Advocate’s, nor any man’s. Men don’t tread like cats. It was a woman who passed my door, and who has been admitted into that room. Being a woman, what woman? If Fool Fritz were here, we would ferret it out between us before we were five minutes older.

“Still talking—talking—like the soft murmur of peaceful waves. Ah! a laugh! By all that’s natural, a woman’s laugh! It is a woman! And I should know that silvery sound. There is a special music in a laugh which cannot be mistaken. It is distinctive—characteristic.

“Ah, my lady, my lady! Fair face, false heart—but woman, woman all over!”

And Pierre Lamont rubbed his hands, and also laughed—but his laugh was like his speech, silent, voiceless.

CHAPTER IX

CHRISTIAN ALMER RECEIVES TWO VISITORS

UPON Christian Almer's desk lay the note written by Adelaide. He saw it the moment he entered the room, and knew, therefore, that some person had called during his absence. At first he thought it must have been the Advocate, who, not finding him in his room, had left the note for him; but as he opened the envelope a faint perfume floated from it.

"It is from Adelaide," he murmured. "How often and how vainly have I warned her!"

He read the note:

"DEAR CHRISTIAN:

"I cannot sleep until I wish you good-night, with no horrid people around us. Let me see you for one minute only.

"ADELAIDE."

To comply with her request at such an hour would be simple folly; infatuated as he was he would not deliberately commit himself to such an act.

"Surely she cannot have been here," he thought. "But if another hand placed this note upon my desk, another person must share the secret which it is imperative should never be revealed. I must be firm with her. There must be an end to this imprudence. Fortunately there is no place in Edward's nature for suspicion."

He blushed with shame at the unworthy thought. Five years ago, could he have seen—he who up to that time never had stooped to meanness and deceit—the position in which he now stood, he would have rejected the mere suspicion of its possibility with indignation. But by what fatally easy steps had he reached it!

In the midst of these reflections his heart almost stopped beating at the sound of a light footstep without. He listened, and heard a soft tapping on the door, not with the

knuckles, but with the finger-tips ; he opened the door, and Adelaide stood smiling before him.

With her finger at her lips she stepped into the room, and closed the door behind her.

"It would not do for me to be seen," she whispered. "Do not be alarmed ; I shall not be here longer than one little minute. I have only come to wish you good-night. Give me a chair, or I shall sink to the ground. I am really very, very frightened. Quick ; bring me a chair. Do you not see how weak I am?"

He drew a chair towards her, and she sank languidly into it.

"As you would not come to me," she said, "I was compelled to come to you."

"Compelled !" he said.

They spoke in low tones, fearful lest their voices should travel beyond the room.

"Yes, compelled. I was urged by a spirit."

His face grew white. "A spirit !"

"How you echo me, Christian. Yes, by a spirit, to which you yourself shall give a name. Shall we call it a spirit of restlessness, or jealousy, or love?" She gazed at him with an arch smile.

"Adelaide," he said, "your imprudence will ruin us."

"Nonsense, Christian, nonsense," she said lightly ; "ruined because I happened to utter one little word ! To be sure I ought, so as to prove myself an apt pupil, to put a longer word before it, and call it platonic love. How unreasonable you are ! What harm is there in our having a moment's chat ? We are old friends, are we not ? No, I will not let you interrupt me ; I know what you are going to say. You are going to say, Think of the hour ! I decline to think of the hour. I think of nothing but you. And instead of looking delighted, as you should do, as any other man would do, there you stand as serious as an owl. Now, answer me, sir. Why did you not come to me the moment you received my note ?"

"I had but just read it when you tapped at my door."

"I forgive you. Where have you been ? With the Advocate ?"

"No ; I have been walking in the grounds."

“You saw nothing, Christian?” she asked with a little shiver.

“Nothing to alarm or disturb me.”

“There was a light in the Advocate’s study, was there not?”

“Yes.”

“He will remain up late, and then he will retire to his room. My life is a very bright and beautiful life with him. He is so tender in his ways—so fond of pleasure—pays me so much attention, and *such* compliments—is so light-hearted and joyous—sings to me, dances with me! Oh, you don’t know him, you don’t indeed. I remember asking him to join in a cotillon; you should have seen the look he gave me!” She laughed out loud, and clapped her hand on her mouth to stifle the sound. “I wonder whether he was ever young, like you and me. What a wonderful child he must have been—with scientific toys, and books always under his arm—yes, a wonderful child, holding in disdain little girls who wished him to join in their innocent games. What is your real opinion of him, Christian?”

“It pains me to hear you speak of him in that way.”

“It should please you; but men are never satisfied. I speak lightly, do I not, but there are moments when I shudder at my fate. Confess, it is not a happy one.”

“It is not,” he replied, after a pause, “but if I had not crossed your path, life would be full of joy for you.”

It was not this he intended to say, but there was such compelling power in her lightest words that his very thoughts seemed to be under her dominion.

“There would have been no joy in my life,” she said, “without you. We will not discuss it. What is, is. Sometimes when I think of things they make my head ache. Then I say, I will think of them no longer. If everybody did the same, would not this world be a great deal pleasanter than it is? Oh, you must not forget what the Advocate called me to-night in your presence—a philosopher in petticoats. Don’t you see that even he is on my side, though it is against himself? Of course one can’t help respecting him. He is a very learned man. He should have married a very learned woman. What a pity

it is that I am not wise! But that is not my fault. I hate learning, I hate science, I hate theories. What is the good of them? They say, this is not right, that is not right. And all we poor creatures can do is to look on in a state of bewilderment, and wonder what they mean. If people would only let the world alone, they would find it a very beautiful world. But they will *not* let it alone; they *will* meddle. A flower, now—is it not sweet—is it not enough that it is sent to give us pleasure? But these disagreeable people say, ‘Of what is this flower composed—is it as good as other flowers—has it qualities, and what qualities?’ What do I care? I put it in my hair, and I am happy because it becomes me, because it is pretty, because Nature sent it to me to enjoy. Why, I have actually made you smile!”

“Because there is a great deal of natural wisdom in what you are saying——”

“Natural wisdom! There now, does it not prove I am right? Thank you, Christian. It comes to you to say exactly the right thing exactly at the right time. I shall begin to feel proud.”

“And,” continued Almer, “if you were only to talk to me like that in the middle of the day instead of the middle of the night——”

She interrupted him again:

“You have undone it all with your ‘ifs.’ What does it matter if it is in the middle of the day or the middle of the night? What is right, is right, is it not, without thinking of the time? Don’t get disagreeable; but indeed I will not allow you to be anything but nice to me. You have made me forget everything I was going to say.”

“Except one thing,” he said gravely, “which you came to say, ‘Good-night.’”

“The minute is not gone yet,” she said with a silvery laugh.

“Many minutes, many minutes,” he said helplessly, “and every minute is fraught with danger.”

“I will protect you,” she said with supreme assurance.

“Do not fear. I see quite plainly that if there is a dragon to kill I shall have to be the St. George. Well, I am ready. Danger is sweet when you are with me.”

He was powerless against her; he resigned himself to his fate.

"Who brought your letter to my room?" he asked.

"Dionetta."

"Have you confided in her?"

"She knows nothing, and she is devoted to me. If the simple maid thought of the letter at all—as to what was in it, I mean—she thought, of course, that it was something I wanted you to do for me to-morrow, and had forgotten to tell you. But even here I was prudent, although you do not give me credit for prudence. I made her promise not to tell a soul, not even her grandmother, that queer, good old Mother Denise, that she had taken a letter from me to you. She did more than promise—she swore she would not tell. I bribed her, Christian—I gave her things, and to-night I gave her a pair of earrings. You should have witnessed her delight! I would wager that she is at this moment no more asleep than I am. She is looking at herself in the glass, shaking her pretty little head to make the diamonds glisten."

"Diamonds, Adelaide! A simple maid like Dionetta with diamond earrings! What will the folks say?"

"Oh, they all know I am fond of her——"

They started to their feet with a simultaneous movement.

"Footsteps!" whispered Almer.

"The Advocate's," said Adelaide, and she glided to the door, and turned the key as softly as if it were made of velvet.

"He will see a light in the room," said Christian. "He has come to talk with me. What shall we do?"

She gazed at him with a bright smile. His face was white with apprehension; hers, red with excitement and exaltation.

"I am St. George," she whispered; "but really there is no dragon to kill; we have only to send him to sleep. Of course you must see him. I will conceal myself in the inner room, and you will lock me in, and put the key in your pocket, so that I shall be quite safe. Do not be uneasy about me; I can amuse myself with books and pictures, and I will turn over the leaves so quietly that

even a butterfly would not be disturbed. And when the dragon is gone I will run away immediately. I am almost sorry I came, it has distressed you so."

She kissed the tips of her fingers to him, and entered the adjoining room. Then, turning the key in the door Christian Almer admitted the Advocate.

CHAPTER X

A BRIEF SURVEY OF THE WEB

PAUSE we here a moment, and contemplate the threads of the web which Chance, Fate, or Retribution was weaving round this man.

With the exception of a few idle weeks in his youth, his life had been a life of honour and renown. His ambition was a worthy one, and success had not been attained without unwearying labour and devotion. Close study and application, zeal, earnestness, unflagging industry, these were the steps in the ladder he had climbed. Had it not been for his keen intellect these qualities would not have been sufficient to conduct him to the goal he had in view. Good luck is not to be despised, but unless it is allied with brain power of a high order only an ephemeral success can be achieved.

Never, to outward appearance, was a great reputation more stable or better deserved. His wonderful talents, and the victories he had gained in the face of formidable odds, had destroyed all the petty jealousies with which he had to cope in the outset of his career, and he stood now upon a lofty pinnacle, acknowledged by all as a master in his craft. Wealth and distinction were his, and higher honours lay within his grasp; and, in addition, he had won for his wife one of the most beautiful of women. It seemed as if the world had nothing to add to his happiness.

And yet destruction stared him in the face. The fabric he had raised, on a foundation so secure that it appeared as if nothing could shake it, was tottering, and might fall, destroying him and all he had worked for in the ruins.

He stood at the door of the only man in the world to

whom he had given the full measure of his friendship. With all the strength of his nature he believed in Christian Almer. In the gravest crisis of his life he would have called this friend to his side, and would have placed in his hands, without hesitation, his life, his reputation, and his honour. To Almer, in their conversation, he had revealed what may be termed his inner life, that life the workings of which were concealed from all other men. And in this friend's chamber his wife was concealed; and dishonour hung over him by the slenderest thread. Not only dishonour, but unutterable grief, for he loved this woman with a most complete undoubting love. Little time had he for dalliance; but he believed in his wife implicitly. His trust in her was a perfect trust.

Within the room at the door of which he was waiting, stood his one friend, with white face and guilty conscience, about to admit him and grasp his hand. Had the heart of this friend been laid bare to him, he would have shrunk from it in horror and loathing, and from that moment to the last moment of his life the sentiment of friendship would have been to him the bitterest mockery and delusion with which man could be cursed.

Not five yards from where he stood lay Pierre Lamont, listening and watching for proofs of the perfidy which would bring disgrace upon him—which would cause men and women to speak of him in terms of derision for his blindness and scorn for his weakness—which would make a byword of him—of him, the great Advocate, who had played his part in many celebrated cases in which woman's faithlessness and disloyalty were the prominent features—and which would cause him to regard the sentiment of love as the falsest delusion with which mankind was ever afflicted.

In the study he had left but a few minutes since slept a man who, in a certain sense, claimed comradeship with him, a man whom he had championed and set free, a self-confessed murderer, a wretch so vile that he had fled from him in horror at the act he had himself accomplished.

And in the open air, upon a hill, a hundred yards from the House of White Shadows, lay John Vanbrugh, a friend of his youth, a man disgraced by his career, watch-

ing for the signal which would warrant him in coming forward and divulging what was in his mind. If what John Vanbrugh had disclosed in his mutterings during his lonely watch was true, he held in his hands the key to a mystery, which, revealed, would overwhelm the Advocate with shame and infamy.

Thus was he threatened on all sides by friend and foe alike.

CHAPTER XI

A CRISIS

“**H**AVE I disturbed you, Christian?” asked the Advocate, entering the room. “I hesitated a moment or two, hearing no sound, but seeing your lamp was lighted, I thought you were up, and might be expecting me.”

“I had an idea you would come,” said Almer, with a feeling of relief at the Advocate’s statement that he had heard no sound; and then he said, so that he might be certain of his ground, “You have not been to my room before to-night?”

“No; for the last two hours I have not left my study. Half an hour’s converse with you will do me good. I am terribly jaded.”

“The reaction of the excitement of the long trial in which you have been engaged.”

“Probably; though I have endured fatigue as great without feeling as jaded as I do now.”

“You must take rest. Your doctors who prescribed repose for you would be angry if they were aware of the strain you have put upon your mind.”

“They do know. The physician I place the greatest faith in writes to me that I must have been mad to have undertaken Gautran’s defence. It might have been better if I had not entered into that trial.”

“You have one consolation. Defended by a lawyer less eminent than yourself, an unfortunate man might have been convicted of a crime he did not commit.”

"Yes," said the Advocate slowly, "that is true."

"You compel admiration, Edward. With frightful odds against you, with the public voice against you, you voluntarily engage in a contest from which nothing is to be gained, and come out triumphant. I do not envy the feelings of the lawyers on the other side."

"At least, Christian, as you have said, they have the public voice with them."

"And you, Edward, have justice on your side, and the consciousness of right. The higher height is yours; you must regard these narrower minds with a feeling of pity."

"I have no feeling whatever for them; they do not trouble me. Christian, we will quit the subject of Gaughran; you can well understand that I have had enough of him. Let us speak of yourself. I am an older man than you, and there is something of a fatherly interest in the friendship I entertain for you. Since my marriage I have sometimes thought if I had a son I should have been pleased if his nature resembled yours, and if I had a daughter it would be in the hands of such a man as yourself I should wish to place her happiness."

"You esteem me too highly," said Almer, in a tone of sadness.

"I esteem you as you deserve, friend. Within your nature are possibilities you do not recognise. It is needful to be bold in this world, Christian; not arrogant, or over-confident, or vain-glorious, but modestly bold. Unless a man assert himself his powers will lie dormant; and not to use the gifts with which we are endowed is a distinct reproach upon us. I have heard able men say it is a crime to neglect our powers, for great gifts are bestowed upon us for others' good as well as for our own. Besides, it is healthy in every way to lead a busy life, to set our minds upon the accomplishment of certain tasks. If we fail—well, failure is very often more honourable than success. We have at least striven to mount the hill which rises above the pettiness and selfishness of our everyday life; we have at least proved ourselves worthy of the spiritual influences which prompt the execution of noble deeds. You did not reply to the letter I sent you in the mountains; but Adelaide heard from you, and that is suffi-

cient. Sufficient, also, that you are here with us, and that we know we have a true friend in the house. You were many weeks in the mountains."

"Yes."

"Were you engaged on any work? Did you paint or write?"

"I made a few sketches, which pleased me one day and displeased me the next, so I tore them up and threw them away. There is enough indifferent work in the world."

"Nothing short of perfection will satisfy you," said the Advocate with a serious smile; "but some men must march in the ranks."

"I am not worthy even of that position," said Almer moodily.

The Advocate regarded him with thoughtful eyes.

"If your mind is not deeply reflective, if your power of observation applies only to the surface of things, you are capable of imparting what some call tenderness and I call soul, to every subject which presents itself to you. I have detected this in your letters and conversation. It is a valuable quality. I grant that you may be unfit to cope with practical matters, but in your study you would be able to produce works which would charm if they did not instruct. There is in you a heart instinct which, as it forms part of your nature, would display itself in everything you wrote."

"Useless, Edward, useless! My father was an author; it brought him no happiness."

"How do you know? It may have afforded him consolation, and that is happiness. But I was not speaking of happiness. The true artist does not look to results. He has only one aim and one desire—to produce a perfect work. His task being done—not that he produces a perfect work, but the ennoblement lies in the aspiration and the earnest application—that being done, he has accomplished something worthy, whatever its degree of excellence. The day upon which a man first devotes himself to such labour he awakes within his being a new and delightful life, the life of creative thought. Fresh wonders continually reveal themselves—quaint suggestions, ex-

quisite fancies, and he makes use of them according to the strength of his intellect. He enriches the world."

"And if he is a poor man, starves."

"Maybe; but he wears the crown. You, however, are rich."

"Nothing to be grateful for. I had no incentive to effort, therefore I stand to-day an idle, aimless man. You have spoken of books. When I looked at crowded bookshelves, I should blush at the thought of adding to them any rubbish of my own creation."

"I find no fault with you for that. Blush if you like—but work, produce."

"And let the world call me vain and presumptuous."

"Give it the chance of judging; it may be the other way. Perhaps the greatest difficulty we have to encounter in life is in the discovery of that kind of work for which we are best fitted. Fortunate the man who gravitates to it naturally, and who, having the capacity to become a fine shoemaker, is not clapped upon a watchmaker's bench instead of a cobbler's stool. Being fitted, he is certain to acquire some kind of distinction. Believe me, Christian, it is not out of idleness, or for the mere purpose of making conversation that I open up this subject. It would afford me great pleasure if you were in a more settled frame of mind. You cannot disguise from me that you are uneasy, perhaps unhappy. I see it this very moment in your wandering glances, and in the difficulty you experience in fixing your attention upon what I am saying. You are not satisfied with yourself. You have probably arrived at that stage when a man questions himself as to what is before him—when he reviews the past, and discovers that he has allowed the years to slip by without having made an effort to use them to a worthy end. You ask yourself, 'Is it for this I am here? Are there not certain duties which I ought to perform? If I allow the future to slip away as the past has done, without having accomplished a man's work in the world, I shall find myself one day an old man, of whom it may be said, "He lived only for himself; he had no thought, no desire beyond himself; the struggles of humanity, the advance of civilisation, the progress and development of thought

which have effected such marvellous changes in the aspects of society, the exposing of error—these things touched him not; he bore no part in them, but stood idly by, a careless observer, whose only ambition it was to utilise the hours to his own selfish pleasures.” A heavy charge, Christian. What you want is occupation. Politics—your inclinations do not lead that way; trade is abhorrent to you. You are not sufficiently frivolous to develop into a butterfly leader of fashion. Law is distasteful to you. Science demands qualities which you do not possess. For a literary life you are specially adapted. I say to you, turn your attention to it for a while. If it disappoint you, it is easy to relinquish it. It will be but an attempt made in the right direction. But understand, Christian, without earnestness, without devotion, without application, it will be useless to make the attempt.”

“And that is precisely the reason why I hesitate to make it. I am wanting in firmness of purpose. I doubt myself; I should have begun earlier.”

“But you will think over what I have said?”

“Yes, I will think of it, and I cordially thank you.”

“And now tell me how you enjoyed yourself in the mountains.”

“Passably well. It was a negative sort of life. There was no pleasure in it, and no pain. One day was so exactly like another, that I should scarcely have been surprised if I had awoke one morning and discovered that in the dull uniformity of the hours my hair had grown white and I into an old man. The principal subject of interest was the weather, and that palled so soon that sunshine or storm became a matter of indifference to me.”

“Look at me a moment, Christian.”

They sat gazing at each other in silence for a little while. There was an unusual tenderness in the Advocate's eyes which pierced Christian Almer to the heart. During the whole of this interview the thought never left his mind:

“If he knew the part I am playing towards him—if he suspected that simply by listening at this inner door he could hear his wife's soft breathing—in what way would he call me to account for my treachery?”

He dreaded every moment that something would occur to betray him.

Adelaide was careless, reckless. If she made a movement to attract attention, if she overturned a chair, if she let a book fall, what was he to say in answer to the Advocate's questioning look?

But all was quiet within; he was tortured only by the whisperings of his conscience.

"You are suffering, Christian," said the Advocate.

Almer knew intuitively that on this point, as on many others, it would be useless to attempt to deceive the Advocate. To return an evasive answer might arouse suspicion. He said simply:

"Yes, I am suffering."

"It is not bodily suffering, though your pulse is feverish." He had taken Almer's wrist, and his fingers were on the pulse. "Your disease is mental." He paused, but Almer did not speak. "It is no breach of confidence," continued the Advocate, "to tell you that on the first day of my entering Geneva, Jacob Hartrich and I had a conversation about you. There was nothing said that need be kept private. We conversed as two men might converse concerning an absent friend in whom both took an affectionate interest. He had noticed a change in you which I have noticed since I entered this room. When you visited him he was impressed by an unusual strangeness in your manner. That strangeness of manner, without your being aware of it, is upon you now. He said that you were restless and ill at ease. You are at this moment restless and ill at ease. The muscles of your face, your eyes, your hands, are not under your control. They respond to the mental disease which causes you to suffer. You will forgive me for saying that you convey to me the impression that you would be more at ease at the present time if I were not with you."

"I entreat you," said Almer eagerly, "not to think so."

"I accept your assurance, which, nevertheless, does not convince me that I am wrong in my impression. The friendship which exists between us is too close and binding—I may even go so far as to say, too sacred—for me, a colder and more experienced man than yourself, to allow it

to be affected by any matter outside its boundary. Deprive it of sympathy, and friendship is an unmeaning word. I sympathise with you deeply, sincerely, without knowing how to relieve you. I ask you frankly, however, one question which you may freely answer. Have you fixed your affections upon a woman who does not reciprocate your love? ”

The Advocate was seated by the desk upon which Almer had, after reading it, carelessly thrown the note written to him by Adelaide, and as he put the question to his friend, he involuntarily laid his hand upon this damning evidence of his wife's disloyalty.

CHAPTER XII

SELF-JUSTIFICATION

THE slight action and the significant question presented a coincidence so startling that Christian Almer was fascinated by it. That there was premeditation or design in the coincidence, or that the Advocate had cunningly led the conversation to this point for the purpose of confounding him and bringing him face to face with his treachery, did not suggest itself to his mind. He was, indeed, incapable of reasoning coherently. All that he was momentarily conscious of was, that discovery was imminent, that the sword hung over him, suspended by a hair. Would it fall, and in its fall compel into a definite course the conflicting passions by which he was tortured?

It would, perhaps, be better so. Already did he experience a feeling of relief at this suggestion, and it appeared to him as if he were bending his head for the welcome blow.

But all was still and quiet, and through the dim mist before his eyes he saw the Advocate gazing kindly upon him.

Then there stole upon him a wild prompting, a mad impulse, to expedite discovery by his own voluntary act—to say to the Advocate:

"I have betrayed you. Read that note beneath your hand; take this key, and open yonder door; find there your wife. What do you propose to do?"

The words did actually shape themselves in his mind, and he half believed that he had uttered them. They did not, however, escape his lips. He was instinctively restrained by the consideration that in his punishment Adelaide would be involved. What right had he deliberately to ruin and expose her? A cowardly act thus to sacrifice a woman who in this crisis relied upon him for protection. In a humiliating, shameful sense it is true, but none the less was she under his direct protection at this moment. Self-tortured as he was he could still show that he had some spark of manliness left in him. To recklessly dispose of the fate of the woman whose only crime was that she loved him—this he dared not do.

His mood changed. Arrived at this conclusion, his fear now was that he had betrayed himself—that in some indefinite way he had given the Advocate the key to his thoughts, or that he had, by look or expression, conveyed to his friend a sense of the terrible importance of the perfumed note which lay upon the desk.

"You do not answer me, Christian," said the Advocate.

But Almer could not speak. His eyes were fixed upon Adelaide's note, and he found it impossible to divert his attention from the idle movements of the Advocate's fingers. His unreasoning impulse to hasten discovery was gone, and he was afflicted now by a feeling of apprehension. It was his imperative duty to protect Adelaide; while the Advocate's hand rested upon the envelope which contained her secret she was not safe. At all risks, even at the hazard of his life, must she be held blameless. Had the Advocate lifted the envelope from the desk, Almer would have torn it from him.

"Why do you not speak?" asked the Advocate. "Surely there is nothing offensive in such a question between friends like ourselves."

"I can offer you no explanation of what I am about to say," replied Almer: "it may sound childish, trivial, pitiful, but my thoughts are not under my own control while your hand is upon that letter."

With the slightest expression of surprise the Advocate handed Almer the envelope, scarcely looking at it as it passed from his possession.

"Why did you not speak of it before?" he said. "But when a mind is unbalanced, trifling matters are magnified into importance."

"I can only ask you to forgive me," said Almer, placing the envelope in his pocket-book. "I have no doubt in the course of your career you have met with many small incidents quite as inexplicable." Then an excuse which would surely be accepted occurred to him. "It may be sufficient for me to say that this is the first night of my return to the house in which I was born and passed a not too happy boyhood, and that in this room my mother died."

The Advocate pressed Almer's hand.

"There is no need for another word. You have been looking over some old family papers, and they have aroused melancholy reminiscences. I should have been more thoughtful; I was wrong in coming to you. It will be best to say good-night."

But Almer, anxious to avoid the slightest cause for suspicion in the right direction, said:

"Nay, stay with me a few minutes longer, or I shall reproach myself for having behaved unreasonably. You were asking——"

"A delicate question. Whether you love without being loved in return?"

"No, Edward, that is not the case with me."

"You have no intention of marrying?"

"No."

"Then your heart is still free. You reassure me. You are not suffering from what has been described as the most exquisite of all human sufferings—unrequited love. Neither have you experienced a disappointment in friendship?"

"No. I have scarcely a friend with the exception of yourself."

"And my wife. You must not forget her. She takes a cordial interest in you."

"Yes, and your wife."

"It was Jacob Hartrich who suggested that you might

have met with a disappointment in love or friendship. I disputed it, in the belief that had it been unhappily so you would have confided in me. I am glad that I was right. Shall I continue? ”

“ Yes.”

“ The banker, who entertains the most kindly sentiments towards you, based all his conjectures upon a certain remark which made a strong impression upon him. You told him you were weary of the gaiety and the light and bustle of cities, and that it was your intention to seek some solitude where, by a happy chance, you might rid yourself of a terror which possessed you. I can understand your weariness of the false glare of fashionable city life; it can never for any long period satisfy the intellect. But neither can it instil a terror into a man’s soul. That would spring from another and a deeper cause.”

“ The words were hastily spoken. Look upon them as an exaggeration.”

“ I certainly regard them in that light, but they were not an invention, and there must have been a serious motive for them. It is not in vain that I have studied your character, although I feel that I did not master the study. I am subjecting you, Christian, to a kind of mental analysis, in an endeavour to arrive at a conclusion which will enable me to be of assistance to you. And I do not disguise from you that, were it in my power, I would assist you even against your will. Our friendship, and my age and more varied experience, would justify me. I do not seek to force your confidence, but I ask you in the spirit of true friendship to consider—not at present, but in a few days, when your mind is in a calmer state—whether such counsel and guidance as it may be in my power to offer will not be a real help to you. Do not lightly reject my assistance in probing a painful wound. I will use my knife gently. There was a time when I believed there was nothing that could happen to either of us which we should be unwilling to confide each to the other, freely and without restraint. I find I am not too old to learn the lesson that the strongest beliefs, the firmest convictions, may be seriously weakened by the occurrence of circumstances for which the

wisest foresight could not have provided. Keep, then, your secret, if you are so resolved, and bear in mind that on the day you come to me and say, 'Edward, help me, guide me,' you will find me ready. I shall not fail you, Christian, in any crisis."

Almer rose and slowly paced the room, while the Advocate sat back in his chair, and watched his friend with affectionate solicitude.

"Does this lesson," presently said Almer, "which you are not too old to learn, spring entirely from the newer impressions you are receiving of my character, or has something in your mind which you have not disclosed helped to lead you to it?"

It was a chance shot, but it strangely hit the mark. The question brought forcibly to the Advocate's mind the position in which he himself was placed by Gautran's confession, and by his subsequent resolve to conceal the knowledge of Gautran's crime.

"What a web is the world!" he thought. "How the lines which here are widely apart, but a short space beyond cross and are linked in closest companionship!" Both Christian and himself had something to conceal, and it would be acting in bad faith to his friend were he to return an evasive answer.

"It is not entirely from the newer impressions you speak of that I learn the lesson. It springs partly from a matter which disturbs my mind."

"Referring to me?"

"No, to myself. You are not concerned in it."

In his turn Almer now became the questioner.

"A new experience of your own, Edward?"

"Yes."

"Which must have occurred to you since we were last together?"

"It originated during your absence."

"Which came upon you unaware—for which your foresight could not have provided?"

"At all events it did not."

"You speak seriously, Edward, and your face is clouded."

"It is a very serious matter."

"Can I help you? Is it likely that my advice would be of assistance?"

"I can speak of it to no one."

"You also have a secret then?"

"Yes, I also have a secret."

Christian Almer appeared to gather strength—a warranty, as it were, for his own wrong-doing—from the singular direction the conversation had taken. It was as though part of a burden was lifted from him. He was not the only one who was suffering—he was not the only one who was standing on a dangerous brink—he was not the only one who had drifted into dangerous waters. Even this strong-brained man, this Advocate who had seemingly held aloof from pleasure, whose days and nights had been given up to study, whose powerful intellect could pierce dark mysteries and bring them into clear light, who was the last man in the world who could be suspected of yielding to a prompting of which his judgment and conscience could not approve—even he had a secret which he was guarding with jealous care. Was it likely then, that he, the younger and the more impressionable of the two, could escape snares into which the Advocate had fallen? The fatalist's creed recurred to him. All these matters of life were preordained. What folly—what worse than folly, what presumption, for one weak man to attempt to stem the irresistible current! It was delivering himself up to destruction. Better to yield and float upon the smooth tide and accept what good or ill fate has in store for him. What use to infuse into the sunlight, and the balmy air, and into all the sweets of life, the poison of self-torture? The confession he had extracted from the Advocate was in a certain sense a justification of himself. He would pursue the subject still further. As he had been questioned, so he would question. It was but just.

"To judge from your manner, Edward, your secret is no light one."

"It is of most serious import."

"I almost fear to ask a question which occurs to me."

"Ask freely. I have been candid with you, in my desire to ascertain how I could help you in your trouble. Be equally candid with me."

"But it may be misconstrued. I am ashamed that it should have suggested itself—for which, of course, the worser part of me is responsible. No—it shall remain unspoken."

"I should prefer that you asked it—nay, I desire you to do so. There is no fear of misconstruction. Do you think I wish to stand in your eyes as a perfect man? That would be arrogant, indeed. Or that I do not know that you and I and all men are possessed of contradictions which, viewed in certain aspects, may degrade the most noble? The purest of us—men and women alike—have undignified thoughts, unworthy imaginings, to which we would be loth to give utterance. But sometimes, as in this instance, it becomes a duty. I have had occasion quite lately to question myself closely, and I have fallen in my own estimation. There is more baseness in me than I imagined. Hesitate no longer. Ask your question, and as many more as may arise from it; these things are frequently hydra-headed. I shall know how far to answer without disclosing what I desire shall remain buried."

Almer put his question boldly.

"Is the fate of a woman involved in your secret?"

An almost imperceptible start revealed to Almer's eyes that another chance arrow had hit the mark. Truly, a woman's fate formed the kernel of the Advocate's secret—a virtuous, innocent woman who had been most foully murdered. He answered in set words, without any attempt at evasion.

"Yes, a woman's fate is involved in it."

"Your wife's?" Had his life depended upon it, Almer could not have kept back the words.

"No, not my wife's."

"In that case," said Almer slowly, "a man's honour is concerned."

"You guess aright—a man's honour is concerned."

"Yours?"

"Mine."

For a few moments neither of them spoke, and then the Advocate said:

"To men suspicious of each other—as most men natu-

rally are, and generally with reason—such a turn in our conversation, and indeed the entire conversation in which we have indulged, might be twisted to fatal disadvantage. In the way of conjecture I mean—as to what is the essence of the secret which I do not reveal to my dearest friend, and the essence of that which my dearest friend does not reveal to me. It is fortunate, Christian, that you and I stand higher than most. We have rarely hesitated to speak heart to heart and soul to soul; and if, by some strange course of events, there has arisen in each of our inner lives a mystery which we have decided not to reveal, it will not weaken the feeling of affection we entertain for each other. Is that so, Christian?”

“Yes, it is so, Edward.”

“Men of action, of deep thought, of strong passion, of sensitive natures, are less their own masters than peasants who take no part in the turmoil of the world. An uneventful life presents fewer temptations, and there is therefore more freedom in it. We live in an atmosphere of wine, and often miss our way. Well, we must be indulgent to each other, and be sometimes ready to say, ‘The position of difficulty into which you have been thrust, the error you have committed, the sin—yes, even the sin—of which you have been guilty, may have fallen to my lot had I been placed in similar circumstances. It is not I who will be the first to condemn you.’”

“Even,” said Almer, “if that error or that sin may be a grievous wrong inflicted against yourself. Even then you would be ready to excuse and forgive?”

“Yes, even in that case. I should be taking a narrow view of an argument if I applied to all the world what I hesitated to apply to myself.”

“So that the committal of a great wrong may be justified by circumstances?”

“Yes, I will go as far as that. The fault of the child or the fault of the man, is but a question of degree. Some err deliberately, some are hurried into error by passions which master them.”

“By natural passions?”

“All such passions are natural, although it is the fashion to condemn them when they clash with the conditions of

social life. The workings of the moral and sympathetic affections are beyond our own control."

"Of those who have erred with deliberate intention and those who have been hurried blindly into error, which should you be most ready to forgive?"

"The latter," replied the Advocate, conscious that in his answer he was condemning himself; "they are comparatively innocent, having less power over, and being less able to retrace their steps."

"You pause," said Almer, a sudden thrill agitating his veins. "Why?"

"I thought I heard a sound—like a suppressed laugh! Did you not hear it?"

"No. I heard nothing."

Almer's teeth met in scorn of himself as he uttered this falsehood. The sound of the laugh was low but distinct, and it proceeded from the room in which Adelaide was concealed.

The Advocate stepped to the door by which he had entered, and looked up and down the passage, to which two lamps gave light. It was quiet and deserted.

"My fancy," he said, standing within the half-open door. "My physicians know more of the state of my nerves than I do myself. It is interesting, however, to observe one's own mental delusions. But I was wrong in mixing myself up with that trial."

Still that trial. Always that trial. It seemed to him as if he could never forget it, as if it would forever abide with him. It coloured his thoughts, it gave form to his arguments. Would it end by changing his very nature?

"You are over-wrought, Edward," said Almer. "If you were to seek what I have sought, solitude, it might be more beneficial to you than it has been to me."

"There is solitude enough for me in this retired village," said the Advocate, "and had I not undertaken the defence of Gautran, my health by this time might have been completely established. We are here sufficiently removed from the fierce passions of the world—they cannot touch us in this primitive birthplace of yours. Do you recognise how truly I spoke when I said that men like ourselves are the slaves, and peasants the free men? Besides,

Christian, there is a medicine in friendship such as yours which I defy the doctors to rival. Even though there has been a veil over our confidences to-night, I feel that this last hour has been of benefit to me. You know that I am much given to thinking to myself. As a rule, at those times, one walks in a narrow groove; if he argues, the contradiction he receives is of that mild character that it can be easily proved wrong. No wonder, when the thinker creates it for the purpose of proving himself right. It is seldom healthy, this solitary communionship—it leads rarely to just conclusions. But in conversation new bye-roads reveal themselves, in which we wander pleasantly—new vistas appear—new suggestions arise, to give variety to the argument and to show that it has more than one selfish side. He who leads entirely a life of thought lives a dead life. Good-night, Christian. I have kept you from your rest. Good-night. Sleep well.”

CHAPTER XIII

SHADOWS.

CHRISTIAN ALMER stood at the door, gazing at the retreating figure of the Advocate. It passed through the clear light of the lamps, became blurred, was merged in the darkness. The corridor was long, and before the Advocate reached the end he was a shadow among shadows.

In Almer's excited mood the slightest impressions became the medium for distorted reflection. The dim form of the Advocate was pregnant with meaning, and when it was finally lost to sight, Almer's eyes followed an invisible figure moving, not through space, but through events in which he and his friend and Adelaide were the principal actors. A wild whirl of images crowded to his mind, presenting in the midst of their confusion defined and distinct pictures, the leading features of which were the consequences arising from the double betrayal of love and friendship. Violent struggles, deadly embraces—in houses, in forests, on the brinks of precipices, in the tor-

rents of furious rivers. The proportions of these images were vast, titanic. The forests were interminable, the trees rose to an immense height, the rivers resembled raging seas, the presentments of animated life were of unnatural magnitude. Even when he and Adelaide were flying through a trackless wood, and were overtaken by the Advocate, this impression of gigantic growth prevailed, as though there were room in the world for naught but themselves and the passions by which they were swayed.

He was recalled to himself by a soft tapping at the door of the inner room. He instantly unlocked it, and released Adelaide, who raised her eyes, beaming with animation, to his.

He was overcome with astonishment. He thought to see her pale, frightened, trembling. Never had he beheld her more radiant.

"He is gone," she said in a gay tone.

"Hush!" whispered Almer, "he may return."

"He will not," she said. "You will see him no more to-night."

"Thank Heaven the danger is averted! I feel as if I had been guilty of some horrible crime."

"Whereas you have simply indulged poor innocent me in a harmless fancy. Christian, I heard every word."

"I thought you would have fallen asleep. How could you have been so imprudent, so reckless, as to laugh?"

"How can I help being a woman of impulse? Were you very much frightened? I was not—I rather enjoyed it. Christian, there is not a single thing my immaculate husband does which does not convince me he has no heart. Just think what might have happened if he had come to the right door and thrown it open and seen me! There! You look so horrified that I feel I have said something wrong again. Christian, what did you mean by saying to him, 'My thoughts are not under my control while you have your hand on that letter'? What letter was it?"

"Your note, which Dionetta left in the room. He was sitting by the desk upon which I had laid it, and his hand was upon it."

"And it made you nervous? To think that he had but to open that innocent bit of paper! What a scene there

would have been! I should have gloried in the situation—yes, indeed. There is no pleasure in life like the excitement of danger. Those who say women are weak know nothing of us. We are braver than men, a thousand, thousand times braver. I tried to peep through the door, but there wasn't a single friendly crevice. What a shock it would have given him if I had suddenly called out as he held the letter: 'Open it, my love, open it and read it!'

"That is what you call being prudent?" said Almer in despair.

"Tyrant! I cannot promise you not to think. I have a good mind to be angry with you. You are positively ungrateful. You shut me up in a room all by myself, where I quietly remain, the very soul of discretion—you did not so much as hear me breathe—only forgetting myself once when my feelings overcame me, and you don't give me one word of praise. Tell me instantly, sir, that I am a brave little woman."

"You are the personification of rashness."

"How ungrateful! Did you think of me, Christian, while I was locked up there?"

"My thoughts did not wander from you for a moment."

"If you had only given me a handful of these rose-leaves so that I might have buried my face in them and imagined I was not tied to a man who loves another woman than his wife! You seem amazed. Do you forget already what has passed between you? If it had happened that I loved him, after his confession to-night I should hate him. But it is indifferent to me upon whom he has set his affections—with all my heart I pity the unfortunate creature he loves. She need not fear me; I shall not harm her. You got at the heart of his secret when you asked him if a woman was involved in it; and you compelled him to confess that his honour—and of course hers; mine does not matter—was at stake in his miserable love-affair. He loves a woman who is not his wife; with all his evasions he could not help admitting it. And this is the man who holds his head so high above all other men—the man who was never known to commit an indiscretion! Of course he must keep his secret close—of course he could not speak of it to his friend, whom he tries

to hoodwink with professions and twisted words! He married me, I suppose, to satisfy his vanity; he wanted the world to see that old as he was, grave as he was, no woman could resist him. And I allowed myself to be persuaded by worldly friends! Is it not a proof of my never having loved him, that, instead of hating him when in my hearing he confesses he loves another, I simply laugh at him and despise him? I should not shed a tear over him if he died to-night. He has insulted me—and what woman ever forgets or forgives an insult? But he has done me a good service, too, and I thank him. How sleepy I am! Good-night. My minute is up, and I cannot stay longer; I must think of my complexion. Good-night, Christian; that is all I came to say.”

CHAPTER XIV

THE ADVOCATE FEARS HE HAS CREATED A MONSTER

THE Advocate did not immediately return to his study. Darkness was more congenial to his mood, and he spent a few minutes in the gardens of the villa. Although he had stated to Christian Almer that the conversation which had passed between them had been of benefit to him, he felt, now that he was alone, that there was much in it to give rise to disturbing thought and conjecture. He had not foreseen the difficulty, in social intercourse, of avoiding the subject uppermost in his mind. A morbid self-consciousness, at present in its germ, and from which he had hitherto been entirely free, seemed to unlock all roads in its direction. It was, as it were, the converging-point of all matters, even the most trivial, affecting himself. Having put the seal upon his resolution with respect to Gautran's confession, he became painfully aware that he had committed himself to a line of action from which he could not now recede without laying himself open to such suspicion, from friend and foe alike, as might fatally injure his reputation. He was a lawyer, and he knew what powerful use he could make of such a weapon against any man, high or low. If it could be

turned against another it could be turned against himself. He must not, therefore, waver in his resolution. Only his conscience could call him to account. Well, he would reckon with that. It was a passive, not an active accuser. Gautran would seek some new locality, in which he would be lost to sight. As a matter of common prudence, it was more than likely he would change his name. The suspicion which attached itself to him, and the horror with which he was regarded in the neighbourhood in which he had lived, would compel him to fly to other pastures. In this, and in the silence of time, lay the Advocate's safety, for every day that passed would weaken the fever of excitement created by the trial. After a few weeks, if it even happened that Gautran were insanelly to make a public declaration of his guilt, and to add to this confession a statement that the Advocate was aware of it during the trial, by whom would he be believed? Certainly not by the majority of the better classes of the people; and in the event of such a contingency, he could quote with effect the poet's words: "Be thou chaste as ice, and pure as snow, thou shalt not escape calumny."

So much, then, for himself; but he was more than ever anxious and ill at ease regarding Christian Almer. The secret which his friend dared not divulge to him was evidently of the gravest import—probably as terrible in its way as that which lay heavily on the Advocate's soul; and the profound mystery in which it was wrapt invested it with a significance so unusual, even in the Advocate's varied experience of human nature, that he could not keep from brooding upon it. Was it a secret in which honour was involved? He could not bring himself to believe that Almer could be guilty of a dishonourable act—but a man might be dragged into a difficulty against his will, and might have a burden of shame unexpectedly thrust upon him which he could not openly fling off without disgrace. And yet—and yet—that he should be so careful in concealing it from the knowledge of the truest of friends—it was inexplicable. Ponder as long as he might, the Advocate could arrive at no explanation of it, nor could his logical mind obtain the slightest clue to the mystery.

The cool air in the gardens refreshed him, and he

walked about, always within view of the lights in his study windows, with his head uncovered. It was during the first five minutes of his solitude that an impression stole upon him that he was not alone. He searched the avenues, he listened, he asked aloud:

“Is any person near, and does he wish to speak to me?”

No voice answered him. The gardens, with the exception of the soft rustling of leaf and branch, were as silent as the grave. Towards the end of his solitary rambling, and as he was contemplating leaving the grounds, this impression again stole upon him. Was it the actual sound of muffled footsteps, or the spiritual influence of an unseen presence, which disturbed him? He could not decide. Again he searched the avenues, again he listened, again he asked a question aloud. All was silent.

This was the third time during the night that he had allowed himself to be beguiled. Once in Christian Almer's room, when he thought he had heard a laugh, and now twice in the solitude of the grounds. He set it down as an unreasoning fancy springing from the agitation into which he had been thrown by his interview with Gautran, and he breathed a wish that the next fortnight were passed, when his mind would almost certainly have recovered its equilibrium. The moment the wish was born, he smiled in contempt of his own weakness. It opened another vein in the psychological examination to which he was subjecting himself.

He entered his study, and did not perceive Gautran, who was asleep in the darkest corner of the room. But his quick observant eye immediately fell upon the glass out of which Gautran had drunk the wine. The glass was on his writing-table; it was not there when he left his study. He glanced at the wine-bottles on the sideboard; they had been disturbed.

“Some person has been here in my absence,” he thought. “Who—and for what purpose?”

He hastily examined his manuscripts and, missing none, raised the wine-glass and held it mouth downwards. As a couple of drops of red liquor fell to the ground, he heard behind him the sound of heavy breathing.

An ordinary man would have let the glass fall from his

hand in sudden alarm, for the breathing was so deep, and strong, and hoarse, that it might have proceeded from the throat of a wild beast who was preparing to spring upon him. But the Advocate was not easily alarmed. He carefully replaced the glass, and wheeled in the direction of the breathing. He saw the outlines of a form stretched upon the ground in a distant corner; he stepped towards it, and stooping, recognised Gautran. He was not startled. It seemed to be in keeping with what had previously transpired, that Gautran should be lying there slumbering at his feet.

He stood quite still, regarding the sleeping figure of the murderer in silence. He had risen to his full height; one hand rested upon the back of a massive oak chair; his face was grave and pale; his head was downwards bent. So he stood for many minutes almost motionless. Not the slightest agitation was observable in him; he was calmly engaged in reflecting upon the position of affairs, as though they related not to himself, but to a client in whose case he was interested, and he was evolving from them, by perfectly natural reasoning, the most extraordinary complications and results. In all his experience he had never been engaged in a case presenting so many rare possibilities, and he was in a certain sense fascinated by the powerful use he could make of the threads of the web in which he had become so strangely and unexpectedly entangled.

Gautran's features were not clearly visible to him; they were too much in shadow. He took from his writing-table a lamp with a soft strong light, and set it near to the sleeping man. It brought the ruffian into full view. His unshaven face, his coarse, matted hair, his brutal sensual mouth, his bushy eyebrows, his large ears, his bared neck, his soiled and torn clothes, the perspiration in which he was bathed, presented a spectacle of human degradation as revolting as any the Advocate had ever gazed upon.

"By what means," he thought, "did this villain obtain information of my movements and residence, and what is his motive in coming here? When he accosted me to-night he did not know where I lived—of that I am convinced, for he had no wish to meet me, and believed he was

threatening another man than myself on the high road. That was a chance meeting. Is this, also, a chance encounter? No; there is premeditation in it. Had he entered another house he would have laid his hands on something valuable and decamped, his purpose being served. He would not dare to rob me, but he dares to thrust his company upon me. Of all men, I am the man he should be most anxious to avoid, for only I know him to be guilty. Have I created a monster who is destined to be the terror and torture of my life? Is he shrewd enough, clever enough, cunning enough, to use his power as I should use it were I in his place, and he in mine? That is not to be borne, but what is the alternative? I could put life into the grotesque oaken features upon which my hand is resting, and they might suggest a remedy. The branches of the tree within which these faces grew in some old forest waved doubtless over many a mystery, but this in which I am at present engaged matches the deepest of them. Some demon seems to be whispering at my elbow. Speak, then; what would you urge me to do?"

THE UNSEEN : "Gautran entered unobserved."

THE ADVOCATE : "That is apparent, or he would not be lying here with the hand of Fate above him."

THE UNSEEN : "No person saw him—no person is aware that he is in your study, at your mercy."

THE ADVOCATE : "At my mercy! You could have found a better word to express your meaning."

THE UNSEEN : "You know him to be a murderer."

THE ADVOCATE : "True."

THE UNSEEN : "He deserves death! You have already heard the whisperings of the voice which urged you to fulfil the divine law, Blood for blood!"

THE ADVOCATE : "Speak not of what is Divine. Tempter, have you not the courage to come straight to the point?"

THE UNSEEN : "Kill him where he lies! He will not be missed. It is night—black night. Every living being in the house, with the exception of yourself, is asleep. You have twisted justice from its rightful course. The wrong you did you can repair. Kill him where he lies!"

THE ADVOCATE: "And have the crime of murder upon my soul?"

THE UNSEEN: "It is not murder. Standing as you are standing now, knowing what you know, you are justified."

THE ADVOCATE: "I will have no juggling. If I kill him it is not in the cause of justice. Speak plainly. Why should he die at my hands?"

THE UNSEEN: "His death is necessary for your safety."

THE ADVOCATE: "Ah, that is better. No talk of justice now. We come to the coarse selfishness of things, which will justify the deadliest crimes. His death is necessary for my safety! How am I endangered? Say that his presence here is a threat. Am I not strong enough to avoid the peril? How vile am I that I should allow such thoughts to suggest themselves! Christian, my friend, whatever is the terror which has taken possession of you, and from which you vainly strive to fly, your secret is pure in comparison with mine. If it were possible that the secret which oppresses you concerned your dearest friend, concerned me, whom perchance it has in some hidden way wronged, how could I withhold from you pity and forgiveness, knowing how sorely my own actions need pity and forgiveness? For the first time in my life I am brought face to face with my soul, and I see how base it is. Has my life, then, been surrounded by dreams, and do I now awake to find how low and abominable are the inner workings of my nature? I must arouse this monster. He shall hide nothing from me."

He spurned Gautran with his foot. It was with no gentle touch, and Gautran sprang to his feet, and would have thrown himself upon the Advocate had he not suddenly recognised him.

CHAPTER XV

GAUTRAN AND THE ADVOCATE

“**H**OW long have I been asleep?” muttered Gautran, shaking himself and rubbing his eyes. “It seems but a minute.” The clock on the mantel struck the hour of two. “I counted twelve when I was in the grounds; I have been here two hours. You might have let me sleep longer. It is the first I have enjoyed for weeks—a sleep without a dream. As I used to sleep before——” He shuddered, and did not complete the sentence. “Give me something to drink, master.”

“You have been helping yourself to my wine,” said the Advocate.

“You know everything, master. Yes, it was wine I drank, as mild as milk. It went down like water. Good for gentlemen, perhaps, but not for us. I must have something stronger.” He looked anxiously round the room, and sighed and smiled; no appalling vision greeted his sight. “Ah,” he said, “I am safe here. Give me some brandy.”

“You will have none, Gautran,” said the Advocate sternly.

“Ah, master,” implored Gautran, “think better of it, I must have brandy—I must!”

“Must!” echoed the Advocate, with a frown.

“Yes, master, must; I shall not be able to talk else. My throat is parched—you can hear for yourself that it is as dry as a raven’s. I must have drink, and it mustn’t be milk-wine. I am not quite a fool, master. If that horrible shadow were never to appear to me again, I would show those who have been hard on me a trick or two that would astonish them. If you’ve a spark of compassion in you, master, give a poor wretch a glass of brandy.”

The Advocate considered a moment, and then unlocked a small cupboard, from which he took a bottle of brandy. He filled a glass, and gave it to Gautran.

“Here’s confusion to our enemies,” said Gautran.

"Ah, this is fine! I have never tasted such before. It puts life into a man."

"What makes you drink to *our* enemies, Gautran?" asked the Advocate.

"Why, master, are not my enemies yours, and yours mine? We row in the same boat. If they found us out, it would be as bad for you as it would be for me. Worse, master, worse, for you have much to lose; I have nothing. You see, master, I have been thinking over things since we met in the lane yonder."

"You are bold and impudent. What if I were to summon my servants and have you marched off to gaol?"

"What would you accuse me of? I have not stolen anything; you may search me if you like. No, no, master, I will take nothing from you. What you give I shall be grateful for; but rob you? No—you are mistaken in me. I owe you too much already. I am bound to you for life."

"You do not seem afraid of the gaol, Gautran."

"Not when you threaten me with it, master, for you are jesting with me. It is not worth your while; I am a poor creature to make sport of."

"Yet I am dangerously near handing you over to justice."

"For what, master, for what? For coming into your room, and not finding you there, throwing myself in a corner like a dog?"

"It is sufficient—and you have stolen my wine. These are crimes which the law is ready to punish, especially in men with evil reputations."

"You are right, I've no doubt; you know more about the law than I do. I don't intend to dispute with you, master. But when they got hold of me they would question me, and my tongue would be loosened against my will. I say again, you are jesting with me. How warm and comfortable it is in this grand room, and how miserable outside! Ah, why wasn't I born rich? It was a most unfortunate accident."

"Your tongue would be loosened against your will! What could you say?"

"What everybody suspects, but could not prove, master, thanks to you. They owe me a grudge in the prison yon-

der—lawyers and judges and gaolers—and nothing would please them better than to hear what I could tell them—that I killed the girl, and that you knew I killed her. You don't look pleased, master. You drove me to say it."

"You slanderous villain!"

"I don't mind what you call me, master. I can bear anything from you. I am your slave, and there is nothing you could set me to do that I am not ready to perform. I mean it, master. Try me—only try me! Think of something fearful, something it would take a bold, desperate man to do, and see if I shrink from it. The gaoler was right when he said I was a lucky dog to get such an Advocate as you to defend me. You knew the truth—you knew I did the deed—you knew no one else could save me—and you wanted to show them how clever you were, and what a fool any lawyer was to think he could stand against you. And you did it, master, you did it. How mad they must be with you! I wonder how much they would give to cry Quits! And you've done even more than that, master. The spirit which has been with me night and day, in prison and out of prison, lying by me in bed, standing by my side in the court—you saw it there, master—dogging me through the streets and lanes, hiding behind trees and gliding upon me when I thought I had escaped it—it is gone, master, it is gone! It will not come where you are. It is afraid of you. I don't care whether it is a holy or an unholy power you possess, I am your slave, and you can do with me as you will. But you must not send me to prison again—no, you must not do that! Why, master, simple as I am, and ignorant of the law, I feel that you are joking with me, when you threaten to summon your servants to march me off to gaol for coming into your house. I should say to them, 'You are a pack of fools. Don't you see he is jesting with you? Here have we been talking together for half an hour, and he has given me his best brandy as a mark of friendship. There is the bottle—feel the rim of it, and you will find it wet. Look at the glass, if you don't believe me. Smell it—smell my breath.' Why, then they would ask you again if you were in earnest, and you would have to send them away. Master, I was never taught to read or write, and there is very little I know—but I know

well that there is a time to do a thing and a time not to do it, and that unless a thing is done at the proper time, there is no use afterwards attempting it. I will tell you something, though I dare say I might save myself the trouble, for you can read what is in me. If Madeline, when she ran from me along the river's bank, had escaped me, it is likely she would be alive at this moment, for the fiend that spurred me on to kill her might never again have been so strong within me, might never again have had such power over me as he had that night. But he was too strong for me, and that was the time to do the deed, and she had to die. Do you think I don't pity her? I do, when she is not tormenting me. But when she follows me, as she has done to-night, when she stands looking at me with eyes in which there is fire, but no light, I feel that I could kill her over again if I dared, and if I could get a good grip of her. Are all spirits silent? Have they no voice to speak? It is terrible, terrible! I must buy masses for her soul, and then, perhaps, she will rest in peace. Master, give me another glass of that rare brandy of yours. Talking is dry work."

"You'll get no more till you leave me."

"I am to leave you, then?"

"When I have done with you—when our conversation is at an end."

"I must obey you, master. You could crush me if you liked."

"I could kill you if I liked," said the Advocate, in a voice so cold and determined that Gautran shuddered.

"You could, master—I know it well enough. Not with your hands; I am your match there. Few men can equal me in strength. But you would not trust to that; you are too wise. You would scorch and wither me with a lightning touch. I should be a fool to doubt it. If you will not give me brandy, give me a biscuit or some bread and meat. Since noon I have had nothing to eat but a few apples, to which I helped myself. The gaolers robbed me of my dinner in the middle of the day, and put before me only a slice of dry bread. I would cut off two of my fingers to be even with them."

In the cupboard which contained the brandy and other

liquors was a silver basket containing biscuits, which the Advocate brought forward and placed before Gautran, who ate them greedily and filled his pockets with them. During the silence the Advocate's mind was busy with Gautran's words. Ignorant as the man was, and confessed himself to be, there was an undisputable logic in the position he assumed. Shrink from it as he might, the Advocate could not avoid confessing that between this man, who was little better than an animal, and himself, who had risen so high above his fellows—that in these extremes of intellectual degradation and superiority—existed a strange and, in its suggestiveness, an awful, equality. And what afforded him food for serious reflection, from an abstract point of view, was that, though they travelled upon roads so widely apart, they both arrived at the same goal. This was proved by Gautran's reasoning upon the Advocate's threat to put him in prison for breaking into the House of White Shadows. "Sound logic," thought the Advocate, "learnt in a school in which the common laws of nature are the teachers. A decided kinship exists between this murderer and myself. Am I, then, as low as he, and do the best of us, in our pride of winning the crown, indulge in self-delusions at which a child might feel ashamed? Or is it that, strive as he may, the most earnest man cannot lift himself above the grovelling motives which set in motion every action of a human life?"

"Now, master," said Gautran, having finished munching.

"Now, Gautran," said the Advocate, "why do you come to me?"

"I belong to you," replied Gautran. "You gave me my life and my liberty. You had some meaning in it. I don't ask you what it is, for you will tell me only what you choose to tell me. I am yours, master, body and soul."

"And soul?" questioned the Advocate ironically.

"So long," said Gautran, crossing himself, "as you do not ask me to do anything to imperil my salvation."

"Is it not already imperilled? Murderer!"

"I have done nothing that I cannot buy off with masses. Ask the priests. If I could not get money any other way, to save myself I would rob a church."

"Admirable!" exclaimed the Advocate. "You interest me, Gautran. How did you obtain admission into the grounds?"

"Over the wall at the back. It is a mercy I did not break my bones."

"And into this room—how did you enter?"

"Through the window."

"Knowing it was my room?"

"Yes, master."

"How did you gain that knowledge?"

"I was told—and told, as well, that you lived in this house."

"By whom were you told?"

"As I ran from Madeline—she has left me forever, I hope—I came upon a man who, for some purpose of his own, was lingering on a hill a little distance from here. I sought company, and was glad of his. I made up my mind to pass my night near something human, and did not intend to leave him. But when he said that yonder was the house in which the great Advocate lived, and when he pointed out your study window, I gave him the slip, knowing I could do better than remain with him. That is the truth, master."

"Are you acquainted with this man?"

"No, I never saw him before; I saw but little of him as it was, the night was so dark; but I know voices when I hear them. His voice was strange to me."

"How happened it, then, that you conversed about me?"

"I can't remember exactly how it came about. He gave me some brandy out of a flask—not such liquor as yours, master, but I was thankful for it—and I asked him if he had ever been followed by the spirit of a dead woman. He questioned me about this woman, asking if she was fair and beautiful, whether she had met her death in the Rhone, whether her name was Madeline. Yes, he called her up before me and I was spellbound. When I came to my proper senses he was talking to himself about a great Advocate in the house he was staring at, and I said there was only one great Advocate—you who set me free—and I asked him if you lived in the house. He said yes, and

that the lights I saw were the lights in your study windows. Upon that I left him, suddenly and secretly, and made my way here."

"Was the man watching this house?"

"It had the look of it. He is no friend of yours, that I can tell you. When he spoke of you it was with the voice of a man who could make you wince if he pleased. You have served him some trick, and he wants to be revenged, I suppose. But you can take care of yourself, master."

"That will do. Leave me and leave this house, and as you value your life, enter it no more."

"Then, you will see me elsewhere. Where, master, and when?"

"I will see you in no place and at no time. I understand the meaning of looks, Gautran, and there is a threat in your eyes. Beware! I have means to punish you. You have escaped the penalty of your crime, but there is no safety for you here. You do not wish to die; the guilt of blood is on your soul, and you are afraid of death. Well may you be afraid of it. Such terrors await you in the life beyond as you cannot dream of. Live, then, and repent; or die, and be eternally lost! Dare to intrude yourself upon me, and death will be your portion, and you will go straight to your punishment. Here, and at this moment only, you have the choice of either fate. Choose, and swiftly."

The cold, stern, impressive voice, the commanding figure, had their effect upon Gautran. He shook with fear; he was thoroughly subdued.

"If I am not safe here, master, where shall I find safety?"

"In a distant part of the country where you are not known."

"How am I to get there? I have no money."

"I will give you sufficient for flight and subsistence. Here are five gold pieces. Now, go, and let me never see your murderous face again."

"Master," said Gautran humbly, as he turned the money over in his hand and counted it. "I must have more—not for myself, but to pay for masses for the repose

of Madeline's soul. Then I may hope for forgiveness—then she will leave me in peace!”

The Advocate emptied his purse into Gautran's open palm, saying, “Let no man see you. Depart as secretly as you came.”

But Gautran lingered still. “You promised me some more brandy, master.”

The Advocate filled the glass, and Gautran, with fierce eagerness, drank the brandy.

“You will not give me another glass, master?”

“No, murderer. I have spoken my last word to you.”

Gautran spoke no more, but with head sunk upon his breast, left the room and the house.

“A vulgar expedient,” mused the Advocate, when he was alone, “but the only one likely to prove effective with such a monster. It is perhaps best that it has happened. This man watching upon the hill is none other than John Vanbrugh. I had almost forgotten him. He does not come in friendship. Let him watch and wait. I will not see him.”

CHAPTER XVI

PIERRE LAMONT SEEKS THE HOSPITALITY OF THE HOUSE OF WHITE SHADOWS.

THE following day Pierre Lamont did not leave his bed, and was visited in his room by the Advocate and Christian Almer. To the Advocate he said:

“I trust I shall not incommode you, for I am compelled to throw myself upon your hospitality.”

“Get well, then,” said the Advocate, “and enjoy it—which you cannot do, thus confined.”

“I do not know—I do not know,” said the old lawyer, gazing at the Advocate, and wondering how it was possible that this profound thinker and observer could be blind to the drama which was being acted at his very door, “one can still follow the world. Have you read the papers this morning?”

"No—I have not troubled myself to look at them."

"Here is one that will interest you. What is called the freedom of the press is growing into a scandal. Editors and critics abuse their charter, and need some wholesome check. But you are not likely to be moved by what they say."

He handed a newspaper to the Advocate, who walked to the window and read the editorial comments upon the trial and the part he had played in it.

"The trial of Gautran is over, and the monster whom all believe to be guilty of a foul murder is set free. The victim, unavenged, is in her grave, and a heavy responsibility lies not only upon the city, but upon the nation. Neither for good nor ill can the words we write affect the future of Gautran. Released by the law, he is universally condemned. Justice is not satisfied. In all Switzerland there is but one man who in his soul believes the degraded wretch to be innocent, and that this man should be right and all others wrong we refuse to believe. Never in a cause so weighty have we felt it our duty to raise our voice against a verdict reluctantly wrung from the citizens whose lot it was to judge a human being accused—and we insist, righteously accused—of a horrible crime. The verdict cannot be disturbed. Gautran is free! There is a frightful significance in these words—Gautran is free!

"Removed from the feverish excitement of the court in which the trial took place, the report of the proceedings reads more like a stage drama than an episode of real life. All the elements which led to the shameful result are eminently dramatic, and were, without doubt, planned by the great Advocate who defended the accused with an eye to dramatic effect. It would scarcely surprise us were the climax now reached to be followed by an anti-climax in which Gautran's champion of yesterday would become his accuser of to-day. Our courts of justice are becoming accustomed to this kind of theatrical display. Consider the profound sensation which would be produced by the great lawyer coming forward and saying, 'Yesterday, after a long and exciting struggle, I proved to you that Gautran was innocent, and by my efforts he was let loose upon society. To-day I propose to prove to you that he is

guilty, and I ask you to mete out to him his just punishment.' A dangerous temptation, indeed, to one who studies effect. But there is a safeguard against such a course. It would so blacken the fame of any man who adopted it, however high that man might stand in the estimation of his peers and the people, that he could never hope to rise from the depths of shame into which his own act had plunged him.

"Many persons who believe that way will doubtless argue that there is something providential in the history of this ruthless murder of an unfortunate innocent being. She is slain. Not a soul comes forward to claim kinship with her. None the less is she a child of God. Human reason leads to the arrest and imprisonment of Gautran. Providence brings upon the scene a great lawyer, who, unsolicited, undertakes the defence of a monster, association with whom is defilement. The wretch is set free, and Justice stands appalled at what has been done in the name of the law. But this is not the end. Providence may have something yet in store which will bring punishment to the guilty and unravel this tangled skein. What, then, will the great Advocate have to say who deliberately and voluntarily brought about a miscarriage of justice so flagrant as to cause every honest heart to thrill with indignation?"

The Advocate did not read any further, but laid the paper aside and said:

"Men who take part in public matters are open to attacks of this kind. There is nothing to complain of."

"And yet," thought Pierre Lamont, when the Advocate left him, "there was in his face, as he read the article, an expression denoting that he was moved. Well,—well—men are but human, even the greatest."

Later in the day he was visited by Christian Almer, to whom he repeated his apologies.

"I have one of my bad attacks on me. They frequently last for days. At such times it is dangerous for me to be moved about."

"Then do not be moved about," said Almer, with a smile.

But despite this smile, Almer was inwardly disquieted. He had not been aware on the previous night that Pierre

Lamont occupied the next room to his. After the departure of the Advocate, Adelaide had not been careful; her voice had been frequently raised, and Almer was anxious to ascertain whether it had reached the old lawyer's ears.

"You slept well, I hope," he said.

"Yes, until the early morning, a little after sunrise. I am a very deep sleeper for four or five hours. The moment I close my eyes sleep claims me, and holds me so securely that, were the house on fire, it would be difficult to arouse me. But the moment the sunshine peeps into my room, my rest is at an end. When I had the use of my limbs I was an early riser."

Almer's mind was relieved. "Sleeping in a strange bed is often not conducive to repose."

"I have slept in so many strange beds." And Pierre Lamont thought as he spoke: "But never in a stranger bed than this."

"You can still find occupation," said Almer, pointing to the books on table and bed.

"Ah, books, books, books!" said Pierre Lamont. "What would the world do without them? How did it ever do without them? But I am old, and I am talking to a young man."

"My father was a bookworm and a student," said Almer. "Were he alive, he would be disappointed that I do not tread in his footsteps."

"Perhaps not. He was a wise man, with a comprehensive mind. It would not do for us all to be monks."

CHAPTER XVII

FRITZ THE FOOL RELATES A STRANGE DREAM TO PIERRE LAMONT

HALF-A-DOZEN times in the course of the day Pierre Lamont had sent in search of Fritz the Fool, and it was not till the afternoon that Fritz made his appearance.

"You should have come earlier, fool," said Pierre Lamont with a frown.

"I was better engaged," said Fritz coolly. "You fired me with those love-verses last night, and I have been studying what to say to my peach."

"The pretty Dionetta! Rehearse, then; I am dull."

"Ah, I have much to tell you. I am thinking of saying to the peach, 'Dionetta, place your hand in mine, and we will both serve Pierre Lamont. He will give us a home; he will pay us liberally; and when he dies he will not leave us unprovided for.'"

"And if the peach should laugh in your face?"

"I would reason with it. I would say, 'Look you now; you cannot be always ripe, you cannot be always mellow and luscious. Do not waste the precious sunshine of life, but give yourself to a clever fool, who cares quite as much for your fair face and beautiful skin as he does for the diamond baubles in your ears.'"

"Diamond earrings, Fritz! Are you dreaming?"

"Not at this moment—though I had a dream last night after I left you which I may tell you if I don't repent of it before I disclose it. Yes, Master Lamont, diamond earrings—as I'm a living fool, diamonds of value. See, Master Lamont, I don't want this peach to be gathered yet. It is well placed, it is in favour; it is making itself in some way useful, not to finer, but to richer fruit. Heaven only knows what may be rained upon it when the very first summer shower brings a diamond finger-ring, and the second a pair of diamond earrings. A diamond brooch, perhaps; money for certain, if it will take a fool's advice. And of course it will do that if, seeing that the fool is a proper fool, the peach says kindly, 'I am yours.' That is the way of it, is it not, Master Lamont?"

"I am waiting to hear more, Fritz," said Pierre Lamont, with a full enjoyment of Fritz's loquacity.

"Behind the summer-house, Master Lamont, lies a lovely lake, clear as crystal in parts where it is not covered with fairy lilies. I am as good as a pair of eyes to you to tell you of these beauties. The water is white and shining and at one part there is a mass of willows bending over; then there is a break, clear of the shadow of branch and leaf; then there is another mass of willows. From a distance you would think that there was no break in the

foliage; you have to go close to it to make the discovery, and once you are there you are completely hidden from sight. Not more than two hours ago I was passing this spot at the back of the willows, when I heard a voice—a girl's voice, Master Lamont—saying quite softly, 'Oh, how lovely! how beautiful—how beautiful!' It was Dionetta's voice; I should know it among a thousand. Through the willows I crept with the foot of a cat till I came to the break, and there was Dionetta herself, bending over the water, and sighing, 'Oh, how lovely! how beautiful!' She could not see me, for her back was towards me, and I took care she did not hear me. She was shaking her pretty head over the water, and I shouldn't deserve to be called a fool if I had not felt curious to see what it was in the lake that was so lovely and beautiful. Perhaps it was her own face she was admiring. Well, she had a perfect right, and I was ready to join in the chorus. I crept up to her as still as a mouse, and looked over her shoulder. She gave a great scream when she saw my face in the lake, and I caught hold of her to prevent her from falling in. Then I saw what almost took away my breath. In her ears there flashed a pair of diamond earrings, the like of which I never in my life beheld in our village. Her face got as red as a sunset as I gazed at her. 'How you frightened me, Fritz!' she said. I set the earrings swinging with my fingers and said, 'Where did you get these wonderful things from?' She answered me pat. 'My lady gave them to me.' 'They are yours, then?' I asked. 'Yes, Fritz,' she said, 'they are mine, and I came here to see how I look in them. They are so grand that I am ashamed to put them on unless I am alone. Don't tell anybody, will you, Fritz? If grandmother knew I had them, she would take them from me. She would never, never let me wear them. Don't tell anybody.' Why, of course I said I would not, and then I asked why my lady gave them to her, and she said it was because my lady loved her. So, so! thought I, as I left my peach—I would like to have given her just one kiss, but I did not dare to try—so, so! my lady gives her maid a pair of diamond earrings that are as suitable to her as a crown of gold to an ass's head. There is something more than common

between lady and maid. What is it, Master Lamont, what is it?"

"A secret, fool, which, if you get your peach to tell, will be worth much to you. And as you and I are going to keep our own counsel, learn from me that this secret has but one of two kernels. Love or jealousy. Set your wits at work, Fritz, set your wits at work, and keep your eyes open. I may help you to your peach, fool. And now about that dream of yours. Were you asleep or awake at the time?"

Fritz stepped cautiously to the door, opened it, looked along the passage, closed the door, and came close to the bedside.

"Master Lamont," he said, "what I dreamt is something so strange that it will take a great deal of thinking over. Do you know why I tell you things?"

"I might guess wrong, Fritz. Save me the trouble."

"You have never been but one way with me; you have never given me a hard word; you have never given me a blow. When I was a boy—twenty years ago and more, Master Lamont—you were the only man who spoke kind words to me, who used to pat my head and pity me. For, if you remember, Master Lamont, I was nothing but a castaway, living on charity, and everybody but you made me feel it. Cuffed by this one and that one, kicked, and laughed at—but never by you. Even a fool can bear these things in mind."

"Well, well, Fritz, go on with your dream. You are making me hungry."

"It came nearly two hours after midnight. At that time I was in the grounds. All was dark. There was nobody about but me, until the Advocate came. Then I slipped aside and watched him. He walked up and down, like a machine. It was not as if a man was walking, but a figure of steel. It was enough to drive me crazy, it was so like clockwork. Twice he almost discovered me. He looked about him, he searched the grounds, still with the same measured step, he called aloud, and asked if anybody was near. Then he went into the house and into the study. I knew he was there by the shifting of the lights in the room. Being alone with the shadows, your love-verses came into my mind, and you may believe me, Master

Lamont, I made my way to the window of the room in which Dionetta sleeps, and stood there looking up at it. I should have been right down ashamed of myself if I hadn't been dreaming. Is it the way of lovers, Master Lamont? 'Faster than bees to flowers they wing their way;' that is how the line runs, is it not? Well, there stood I, a bee, dreaming in the dark night, before the window of my flower. An invisible flower, unfortunately. But thoughts are free; you can't put chains on them. So there stood I, for how many minutes I cannot say, imagining my flower. Now, if I had known that her pretty head was lying on the pillow, with great diamond earrings in her ears—for that is a certainty—I might not perhaps have been able to tear myself away. Luckily for my dream, that knowledge had still to come to me, so I wandered off, and found myself once more staring at the lights in the Advocate's study windows. Now, what made me step quite close to them, and put my eye to a pane which the curtains did not quite cover? I could see clear into the room. Imagine my surprise, Master Lamont, when I discovered that the Advocate was not alone! Master Lamont, you know every man in the village, but I would give you a thousand guesses, and you would not hit upon the name of the Advocate's friend. From where I stood I could not hear a word that was said, but I saw everything. I saw the Advocate go to a cupboard, and give this man liquor; he poured it out for him himself. Then they talked—then the Advocate brought forward a silver basket of biscuits, and the man ate some, and stuffed some into his pockets. They were on the very best of terms with each other. The Advocate gave his friend some money—pieces of gold, Master Lamont; I saw them glitter. The man counted them, and by his action, asked for more; and more was given; the Advocate emptied his purse into the man's hand. Then, after further conversation, the man turned to leave the room. It was time for me to scuttle from my peep-hole. Presently the man was in the grounds stepping almost as softly as I stepped after him. For I was not going to lose him, Master Lamont; my curiosity was whetted to that degree that it would have taken a great deal to prevent me from following this friend of the Advo-

cate's. 'How will he get out?' thought I; 'the gates are locked; he will hardly venture to scale them.' Two or three times he stopped, and looked behind him; he did not see me. He arrived at the wall which stretches at the back; he climbed the wall; so did I, in another and an easier part; he dropped down with a thud and a groan; I let myself to the ground without disturbing a leaf. Presently he picked himself up and walked off, with more haste than before. I followed him. He stopped; I stopped; he walked on again, and so did I. Again he stopped and cried aloud: 'I hear you follow me! Is not one killing enough for you?' And then he gave a scream so awful that the hair rose on my head. 'She is here!' he screamed; 'she is here, and is driving me to madness!' With that he took to his heels and tore through field and forest really like a madman. I could not keep up with him, and after an hour's running I completely lost sight of him. There was nothing for me to do but to get back to the villa. I returned the way I came—I had plenty to think about on the road—and I was once more before the windows of the Advocate's study. The lights were still there. The Advocate, I believe, can live without sleep. I peeped through the window, and there he was, sitting at his table reading, with an expression of power in his face which might well make any man tremble who dared to oppose him. That is the end of my dream, Master Lamont."

"But the man, Fritz, the man!" exclaimed Pierre Lamont. "I am still in ignorance as to who this strange, nocturnal visitor can be."

"There lies the pith of my dream. If I were to tell you that this man who makes his way secretly into the grounds in the darkness of the night—who is closeted with the Advocate for an hour at least—who is treated to wine and cake—who is presented with money, and grumblingly asks for more, and gets it—if I were to tell you that this man is Gautran, who was tried for the murder of Madeline, the flower-girl, and who was set free by the Advocate—what would you say, Master Lamont?"

"I should say," replied Pierre Lamont with some difficulty controlling his excitement, "that you were mad, fool Fritz."

"Nevertheless," said Fritz with great composure, "it is so. I have related my dream as it occurred. The man was Gautran and no other. Can you explain that to me in one word?"

"No," said Pierre Lamont, gazing sharply at Fritz. "You are not fooling me, Fritz?"

"If it were my last word it would make no difference. I have told you the truth."

"You know Gautran's face well?"

"I was in the court every day of the trial, and there is no chance of my being mistaken. See here, Master Lamont. I can do many things that would surprise people. I can draw faces. Give me a pencil and some paper."

With a few rapid strokes he produced the very image of Pierre Lamont, sitting up in bed, with thin, cadaverous face, with high forehead and large nose; even the glitter of the old lawyer's eyes was depicted. Pierre Lamont examined the portrait with admiration.

"I am proud of you, Fritz," he said; "you have the true artist's touch."

Fritz was busy with the pencil again. "Who may this be?" he asked, holding another sketch before Pierre Lamont.

"The Advocate. To the life, Fritz, to the life."

"This is also to the life," said Fritz, producing a third portrait. "This is Gautran. It is all I can draw, Master Lamont—human faces; I could do it when I was a boy. There is murder in Gautran's face; there was murder in the words I heard him speak as I followed him: 'Is not one killing enough for you?' There is only one meaning to such words. I leave you to puzzle it all out, Master Lamont. You have a wise head; I am a fool. Mother Denise may be right, after all, when she said—not knowing I was within hearing—that it was an evil day when my lady, the Advocate's wife, set foot in the grounds of the House of White Shadows. But it is no business of mine; only I must look after my peach, or it may suddenly be spirited away on a broomstick. Unholy work, Master Lamont, unholy work! What do you say to letting Father Capel into the mystery?"

“Not for worlds!” cried Pierre Lamont. “Priests in such matters are the rarest bunglers. No—the secret is ours, yours and mine; you shall be well paid for your share in it. Without my permission you will not speak of it—do you hear me, Fritz?”

“I hear you, and will obey you.”

“Good lad! Ah, what would I give if I had the use of my limbs! But you shall be my limbs and my eyes—my second self. Help me to dress, Fritz—quick, quick!”

“Master Lamont,” said Fritz with a sly laugh, “be careful of your precious self. You are ill, you know, very, very ill! You must keep your bed. I cannot run the risk of losing so good a master.”

“I have a dozen years of life in me yet, fool. This dried-up old skin, these withered limbs, this lack of fat, are my protection. If I were a stout, fine man I might go off at any moment. As it is, I may live to a hundred—old enough to see your grandchildren, Fritz. But yes, yes, yes—I am indeed very ill and weak! Let everybody know it—so weak and ill that it is not possible for me to leave this hospitable house for many, many days. The medicine I require is the fresh air of the gardens. With my own eyes I must see what I can of the comedy that is being played under our very noses. I, also, had dreams last night, Fritz, rare dreams! Ah—what a comedy, what a comedy! But there are tragic veins in it, fool, which make it all the more human.”

BOOK V.—THE DOOM OF GAUTRAN

CHAPTER I

ADELAIDE STRIVES TO PROPITIATE PIERRE LAMONT

THE following night was even darker than the preceding one had been. In the afternoon portents of a coming storm were apparent in the sky. Low mutterings of thunder in the distance travelled faintly to the ears of the occupants of the House of White Shadows. The Advocate's wife shuddered as she heard the sounds.

"There are only two things in the world I am afraid of," she said to Pierre Lamont, "and those are thunder and lightning. When I was a little child a dreadful thing occurred to me. I was playing in a garden when a storm came on. I was all alone, and it was some distance to the house. The storm broke so suddenly that I had not time to reach shelter without getting myself drenched. I dare say, though, I should have run through it had I not been frightened by the flashes of lightning that seemed to want to cut me in two. I flew behind a tree, and stood there trembling. Every time a flash came I shut my eyes tight and screamed. But the storm did not allow my cries to be heard. You can imagine the state I was in. It would not have mattered, except for the wetting, had I kept my eyes closed, but like a little fool, I opened them once, and just at that moment a flash seemed to strike the tree behind which I stood. I can almost hear the shriek I gave, as I fell and fainted dead away. There, lying on the wet grass, I was found. A dreadful looking object I must have been! They carried me into the house, and when I was conscious of what was passing around me, I asked why they did

not light the gas. The fact is I was quite blind, and remained so for several days. Was it not shocking? I shall never, never forget my fright. Can you imagine anything more dreadful than being struck blind? To be born blind cannot be half as bad, for one does not know what one loses—never having seen the flowers, and the fields, and the beautiful skies. But to enjoy them, and then to lose them! It is altogether too horrible to think of.”

She was very gracious to the old lawyer during the afternoon.

“Do you know,” she said, “I can’t quite make up my mind whether to be fond or frightened of you.”

“Be fond of me,” said Pierre Lamont, with a queer look.

“I shall see how you behave. I am afraid you are very clever. I don’t like clever people, they are so suspicious, pretending to know everything always.”

“I am very simple,” said Pierre Lamont, laughing inwardly. He knew that she wanted to propitiate him; “and beauty can lead me by a silken thread.”

“Is that another of your compliments? I declare, you speak as if you were a young man.”

She did, indeed, desire to win Pierre Lamont entirely to her, and she would have endured much to make him her friend instead of her enemy. Christian Almer had told her that the old lawyer had slept in the next room to his, and she had set herself the task of sounding the old fellow to ascertain whether his suspicions were aroused, and whether she had anything to fear from him. She could not help saying to herself what a fool Mother Denise—who looked after the household arrangements—was to put him so close to Christian.

“I do believe,” thought Adelaide, “that she did it to spite me.”

Her mind, however, was quite at ease after chatting with the old lawyer.

“I am so glad we are friends,” she said to him; “it is altogether so much nicer.”

Pierre Lamont looked reproachfully at her, and asked

how she could ever have supposed he was anything but her most devoted admirer.

"Lawyers are so fond of mischief," she replied, "that if it does not come to them ready-made they manufacture it for themselves."

"I am no longer a lawyer," he said; "if I were twenty years younger I should call myself a lover."

"If you were twenty years younger," she rejoined gaily, "I should not sit and listen to your nonsense."

Being called from his side she turned and gave him an arch look.

"All that only makes the case stronger, my lady," he said inwardly. "You cannot deceive me with your wiles."

CHAPTER II

GAUTRAN SEEKS JOHN VANBRUGH

DURING the chief part of the day Gautran concealed himself in the woods. Twice had he ventured to present himself to his fellow-creatures. He was hungry, and in sore need of food, and he went to a wayside inn, and called for cold meat and bread and brandy.

"Can you pay for it?" asked the innkeeper suspiciously.

Gautran threw down a gold piece. The innkeeper took it, bit it, turned it over and over, rang it on the wooden table, and then set the food before Gautran.

The murderer ate ravenously; it was the first sufficient meal he had eaten for days. The innkeeper gave him his change, and he ordered more meat and brandy, and paid for them. While he was disposing of this, two men came up, eyed him, and passed into the inn; Gautran was eating at a little table in the open air.

Presently the innkeeper came out and looked at him; then the innkeeper's wife did the same; then other men and women came and cast wrathful glances upon him.

At first he was not conscious that he was being thus observed, he was so ravenously engaged; but his hunger

being appeased, he raised his head, and saw seven or eight persons standing at a little distance from him, and all with their eyes fixed upon his face.

"What are you staring at?" he cried. "Did you never see a hungry man eat before?"

They did not answer him, but stood whispering among themselves.

The idea occurred to Gautran to take away with him a supply of food, and he called to the innkeeper to bring it to him. Instead of doing so, the innkeeper removed the plates and glasses in which the meal had been served. Having done this, he joined the group, and stood apart from Gautran, without addressing a word to him.

"Do you hear me?" shouted Gautran. "Are you deaf and dumb?"

"Neither deaf nor dumb," replied the innkeeper; "we hear you plain enough."

"Bring me the bread and meat, then," he said.

"Not another morsel," said the innkeeper. "Be off with you."

"When I get the food."

"You will get none here—nor would you have had bite or sup if I had known."

"Known what?" demanded Gautran fiercely. "Is not my money as good as another man's?"

"No."

"Why?"

"Because there is blood upon it."

If this did not convince him that his name was known and execrated, what next transpired would have enlightened him. The innkeeper's wife came out with a glass and two plates in her hands.

"Are these the things," she asked of her husband, "the monster has been eating out of?"

"Yes," replied the innkeeper.

She dashed them to the ground and shivered them to pieces, and the onlookers applauded the act.

"Why do you do that, Mistress?" cried Gautran.

"So that honest men shall not be poisoned," was the answer, "by eating out of a murderer's dish or putting their lips to a murderer's glass."

And the onlookers again applauded her, and kicked away the pieces.

Gautran glared at the men and women, and asked:

“Who do you take me for?”

“For Gautran. There is but one such monster. If you do not know your own face, look upon it there.”

She pointed to the window, and there he beheld his own portrait, cut out of an illustrated newspaper, and beneath it his name—“GAUTRAN,” to which had been added, in writing, the words, “The Murderer of Madeline, the Flower-Girl.”

He could not read the inscription, but he correctly divined its nature. The moment before he saw his portrait, it had entered his mind to deny himself; he recognised now how futile the attempt would be.

“What if I am Gautran?” he exclaimed. “Do you think the law would set me free if I was guilty?”

To which the innkeeper’s wife replied:

“You have escaped by a quibble. You are a murderer, and you know yourself to be one.”

“Mistress,” he said, “if I had you alone I would make you smart.”

“How does that sound, men?” cried the innkeeper’s wife with excited gestures. “Is it the speech of an innocent man? He would like to get me alone. Yes, he got one poor girl alone, and we know what became of her. The coward! the murderer! Hunt him away, neighbours. It is a disgrace to look upon him.”

They advanced towards Gautran threateningly, and he drew his knife and snapped it open.

“Who will be the first?” he asked savagely, and seeing that they held together, he retreated backwards, with his face to them, until a turn in the road hid them from his sight. Then he fled into the woods, and with wild cries slashed the trees with his knife, which he had sharpened in the early morning.

On the second occasion he presented himself at a cottage door, with the intention of begging or buying some food. He knocked at the door, and not receiving an answer, lifted the latch. In the room were two children—a baby in a cradle, and a five-year-old boy sitting on the

floor, playing with a little wooden soldier. Looking up, and seeing the features of the ruffian, the boy scrambled to his feet, and rushing past Gautran, ran screaming down the road. Enraged almost to madness, Gautran ran after the child, and catching him, tossed him in the air, shouting:

“What! you, too, brat? This for your pains!”

And standing over the child, was about to stamp upon him, when he found himself seized by the throat. It was the father, who, hearing the child's screams, came up just in time to save him. Then ensued a desperate struggle, and Gautran, despite his boast to the Advocate, found that he had met more than his match. He was beaten to the ground, lifted, and thrown into the air, as he had thrown the child. He rose, bruised and bleeding, and was slinking off, when the man cried:

“Holy Mother! it is the murderer, Gautran!”

Some labourers who were coming across the fields, were attracted by the scuffle, and the father called out to them:

“Here is Gautran the murderer, and he has tried to murder my child!”

This was enough for them. They were armed with reaping-hooks, and they raced towards Gautran with loud threats. They chased him for full a mile, but he was fleet of foot than they, and despair gave him strength. He escaped them, and sank, panting, to the ground.

The Advocate had spoken truly. There was no safety for him. He was known for miles round, and the people were eager for vengeance. He would hide in the woods for the rest of the day. There was but one means of escape for him. He must seek some distant spot, where he and his crime were unknown. But to get there he would be compelled to pass through villages in which he would be recognised. It was necessary that he should disguise himself. In what way could this be done? He pondered upon it for hours. In the afternoon he heard the muttering of the thunder in the distant mountains.

“There's a storm coming,” he said, and he raised his burning face to meet the welcome rain. But only a few heavy drops fell, and the wind moaned through the woods

as if in pain. Night stole upon him swiftly, and wrapt him in horrible darkness. He bit his lips, he clenched his hands, his body shook with fear. Solitude was worse than death to him. He tried to sleep; in vain. Terrible images crowded upon him. Company he must have, at all hazards. Suddenly he thought of John Vanbrugh, the man he had met the night before on the hill not far from the Advocate's house. This man had not avoided him. He would seek him again, and, if he found him, would pass the night with him. So resolving, he walked with feverish steps towards the hill on which John Vanbrugh was keeping watch.

CHAPTER III

GAUTRAN RESOLVES ON A PLAN OF ESCAPE

THE distance was longer than Gautran had calculated, and he did not shorten it by the devious tracks he took in his anxiety to avoid meeting with his enemies. The rainstorm still kept off, but, in spite of the occasional flashes of lightning, the darkness seemed to grow thicker and thicker, and he frequently missed his way. He kept on doggedly, however, and although the shadow of his crime waited upon his steps, and made itself felt in the sighing and moaning of the wind, in the bending of every branch, and in the fluttering of every leaf, the craving for human companionship in which there was something of sympathy, and from which he would not be hunted like a dog, imbued him with courage to fight these terrors. Often, indeed, did he pause and threaten with fearful words the spectre of the girl he had murdered; and sometimes he implored her to leave him, and told her he was going to pay for masses for the repose of her soul. Occasionally he was compelled to take the high road, and then he was grateful for the darkness, for it prevented his face from being seen. At those times he slunk close to the hedges, as though dreading that the slightest contact with a human being would lead to discovery. Terrible as the night was to

him, he feared the approach of day, when it would be more difficult to conceal himself from his pursuers. He knew that his life was not safe while he remained in this fatal neighbourhood. He *must* escape, and in disguise, before he was many hours older. How was this to be accomplished? Once, in the roadway, he followed with stealthy steps two men who were conversing. He would have avoided them, as he had avoided others, had it not been that he heard his name mentioned, and was morbidly curious to hear what they were saying about him.

Said one: "I have not set eyes upon this man-monster, but I shall know him if I meet him in the light."

To which the other replied: "How will you manage that, if you have never seen his face?"

"You ask a foolish question. Have not full descriptions of the murderer been put about everywhere? His features, the colour of his hair, his clothes, from his cap to his boots—all is known. His face he might disguise by a slash of his knife, if he has courage enough for it, or he might stain it—and in that way, too, he might change the colour of his hair. But his clothes would remain. The shirt he wears is one in a thousand, and there's no mistaking it. It is blue, with broad yellow bands, which encircle his villainous body like rings. Let him get another shirt if he can. The country is aroused for twenty miles round, and men are resolved to take justice into their own hands. The law has allowed him to slip through its fingers; he shall not slip through ours. Why, he said to a woman this morning that he would know how to serve her if he had her alone, and not long afterwards he tried to murder a child! Shall such a monster be allowed to remain at liberty to strike women down and murder the helpless? No—we don't intend to let him escape. Men are on the watch for him everywhere, and when he is caught he will be beaten to death, or hung upon the nearest tree. There is another end for him, if he chooses to take it. He can hide in the woods and starve, and when his body is found, we'll drive a stake through it. Take my word for it, Gautran, the murderer, has not long to live."

Gautran shook with fear and rage.

"I could spring upon them with my knife," he thought, "but they are two to one."

And then, when the men were out of hearing, he shook his fist at them, and muttered:

"Curse you! I will cheat you yet!"

But how? The description given of his shirt was a faithful one; the broad yellow bands were there, and he remembered that, two days before the end of his trial, the gaolers had taken it from his cell in the night, and returned it to him in the morning, washed, with the yellow colour brighter than it had been for months. He knew now that this had been done out of malice, in case he should be acquitted, so that he might be the more readily recognised and shunned, or the more easily tracked and caught if he was again wanted. There loomed upon him a way to foil those who had vowed to kill him. The man he was seeking had spoken in a reckless manner; he had complained of the world, and was doubtless in want of money. He had gold which the Advocate had given him; he would offer to buy the man's clothes, and would give him his own, and one, two, or even three gold pieces in exchange. An easy thing to accomplish. But if the man would not consent to the bargain! He smiled savagely, and felt the edge of his knife. He was thoroughly desperate. He would sacrifice a thousand lives to save his own.

Out of this murderous alternative—and out of the words uttered by the man he had overheard, "His face he might disguise by a slash of his knife if he has courage for it"—grew ideas which, as he plodded on gradually arranged themselves into a scheme which would ensure him an almost sure escape from those who had leagued themselves against him. Its entire success depended upon certain physical attributes in John Vanbrugh—but he would risk it even if these were not as he wished them to be. The plan was horrible in its design, and needed strength and cunning. He had both, and would use them without mercy, to ensure his safety. John Vanbrugh, with whose name he was not acquainted, was probably a stranger in the locality; something in Vanbrugh's speech caused him to suspect this. He would assure himself first of the fact, and then the rest was easy. Vanbrugh

was about his own height and build; he had stood by his side and knew this to be so. Gautran should die this night in the person of another man, and should be found in the morning, murdered, with features so battered as to defy recognition. But he would be attired in Gautran's clothes, and would by those means be instantly identified. Then he, the true Gautran, would be forever safe. In John Vanbrugh's garments he could make his way to a distant part of the country, and take another name. No one would suspect him, for Gautran would be dead; and he would buy masses for the repose of Madeline's soul, and so purge himself of blood-guiltiness. As to this second contemplated crime he gave it no thought, except that it was necessary, and must be done.

CHAPTER IV

HEAVEN'S JUDGMENT

WITHIN half an hour of midnight he arrived at the hill, and saw the shadow of a man who was leaning against a tree. Gautran had been walking for nearly three hours, and during the whole time the storm of thunder and lightning had continued at intervals, now retreating, now advancing; but its full force had been spent many miles away, and it did not seem likely to approach much nearer to the House of White Shadows.

"The man is there," muttered Gautran, "with his face still towards the Advocate's window. What is his purpose?"

He was curious about that, too, and thought he would endeavour to ferret it out. It might be useful to him in the future, for it concerned the Advocate. There was plenty of time before him to accomplish his own murderous design.

John Vanbrugh heard Gautran's footsteps.

"Who comes this way?" he cried.

"A friend," replied Gautran.

"That is easily said," cried Vanbrugh. "I am not in a trustful mood. Hold off a bit, or I may do you mischief."

"Do you not know me?" asked Gautran, approaching closer, and measuring himself with the dark form of Vanbrugh. They were of exactly the same height.

"What, Gautran!" exclaimed Vanbrugh in a gay tone.

"Yes, Gautran."

"Welcome, friend, welcome," said Vanbrugh, with a laugh. "Give me your hand. Veritable flesh and blood. You have a powerful grip, Gautran. I thought we should meet again. What caused you to make yourself scarce so suddenly last night? You vanished like a cloud."

"I had business to do. Have you got any more of that brandy about you?"

"I am not sure whether you deserve it. After emptying my flask, you may make off again. A poor return for hospitality, my friend."

"I promise to remain with you—it is what I came for—if you give me brandy."

"I take your word," said Vanbrugh, producing a flask. "Drink, but not too greedily."

Gautran took a long draught and returned the flask, saying, "You have no food, I suppose?"

"Why, yes, I have. Warned by previous experiences I supplied myself liberally for this night's watch. I'll not refuse you, though I spent my last franc on it."

"Ah," said Gautran, with some eagerness, for an amicable exchange of clothing would render the more villainous part of his task easier of accomplishment, "you are poor, then?"

"Poor? Yes, but not for long, Gautran. The days of full purses are coming. Here is the food. Eat, rogue, eat. It is honest bread and meat, bought and paid for; but none the sweeter for that. We know which fruit is the sweetest. So you had business to do when you took French leave of me! How runs the matter? I had just pointed out the Advocate's window to you—your own special Advocate, my friend, to whom you have so much reason to be grateful—when you disappeared like an arrow from a bow. What follows then? That, leaving me so abruptly, your business was important, and that it concerned the Advocate. Right or wrong, rogue?"

"Right," replied Gautran, as he devoured the food.

"Come, that's candid of you, and spoken like a friend. You did not know, before I informed you, that he lived in the villa yonder?"

"I did not."

"I begin to have hopes of you. And learning it from me, you made up your mind on the spur of the moment—your business being so important—to pay him a friendly visit, despite the strangeness of the hour for a familiar call?"

"You've hit it," said Gautran.

John Vanbrugh pondered a while. These direct answers, given without hesitation, puzzled him. He had expected to meet with prevarication, and he was receiving, instead, straightforward confidence.

"You are not afraid," he said, "to speak the truth to me, Gautran?"

"I am not."

"But I am a stranger to you."

"That's true."

"Why, then, do you confide in me?"

It was Gautran's turn now to pause, but he soon replied, with a sinister look which John Vanbrugh, in the darkness, could not see:

"Because, after what passes between us this night, I am sure you will not betray me."

"Good," said Vanbrugh; "then it is plain you sought me deliberately, because you think I can in some way serve you."

"Yes, because you can in some way serve me—that is why I am here."

"Then you intend to hide nothing from me?"

"Nothing—for the reason I have given."

A flash of lightning seemed to strike the spot on which he and Gautran were conversing, and he waited for the thunder. It came—long, deep, and threatening.

"There is a terrible storm somewhere," he said.

"It does not matter," rejoined Gautran, with a shudder, "so long as a man is not alone. Don't mind my coming so close. I have walked many a mile to find you. I have not a friend in the world but you."

"Not even the Advocate?"

"Not even him. He will see me no more."

"He told you that last night?"

"Yes."

"But how did you get to him, Gautran? You did not enter by the gates."

"No; I dropped over the wall at the back. Tell me. It is but fair; I answer you honestly enough. What are you watching his house for? A man does not do as you are doing, on such black nights as this, for idle pastime."

"No, indeed, Gautran! I also have business with him. And strangely enough, you, whom I met in the flesh for the first time within these last twenty-four hours, are indirectly concerned in it."

"Am I? Strange enough, as you say. But it will not matter after to-night."

Some hidden meaning in Gautran's tone struck warningly upon John Vanbrugh, and caused him to bestow a clearer observance upon Gautran's movements from this moment.

"There is a thing I wish to know, Gautran," he said. "Between vagabonds like ourselves there is no need for concealment. It is a delicate question, but you have been so frank with me that I will venture to ask it. Besides, there are no witnesses, and you will not, therefore, incriminate yourself. This girl, Madeline, whose spirit follows you——"

Vanbrugh hesitated. The question he was about to ask trembled on his lips, and he scarcely knew how to give it shape in words that would not provoke an outbreak on the part of Gautran. He had no desire to come into open collision with this ruffian, of whose designs upon himself he was inwardly warned. Gautran, with brutal recklessness, assisted him.

"You want to know if I killed her?"

"Why, yes—though you put it roughly."

"What matter? Well, then, she died at my hands."

John Vanbrugh recoiled from the murderer in horror, and in a suppressed tone asked:

"When the Advocate defended you, did he know you were guilty?"

"Aye. We kept the secret to ourselves. It was cleverly worked, was it not?"

"And last night," continued John Vanbrugh, "he received you in his study?"

"Aye—and gave me liquor, and food, and money. Listen to it." He rattled the gold pieces in the palms of his hands. "Look you. I have answered questions enough. I answer no more for a while. It is my turn now."

"Proceed, Gautran," said Vanbrugh; "I may satisfy you or not, according to my whim."

"You'll satisfy me, or I'll know the reason why. There is no harm in what I am going to say. You are a stranger in these parts—there is no offence in that, is there?"

"None. Yes, I am a stranger in these parts. Heavens! what a flash! The storm is coming nearer."

"All the better. You will hardly believe that I have been bothering myself about the colour of your hair. I hate red-haired men. Yours, now. Is there any offence in asking the colour of it?"

"None. My hair is black."

Gautran's eyes glittered and a flash of lightning illuminated his face, and revealed to Vanbrugh the savage and ruthless look which shone there.

"And your height and build, about the same as mine," said Gautran. "Let us strike a bargain. I have gold—you have none. I have taken a fancy to your clothes; I will buy them of you. Two gold pieces in exchange for them, and mine thrown in."

"The clothes of a murderer," said Vanbrugh, slowly retreating as Gautran advanced upon him. "Thank you for nothing. Not for two hundred gold pieces, poor as I am. Keep off. Do not come so near to me."

"Why not? You are no better than I. Three gold pieces! That should content you."

"You have my answer, Gautran. Leave me, I have had enough of you."

"You will have had more than enough before I have done with you," said Gautran, and Vanbrugh was satisfied now, from the man's brutal tones, that it was a deadly foe who stood within a few inches of him, "if you do not do

as I bid you. Say, done and done; you had better. By fair means or foul I mean to have what I want."

"Not by fair means, you murderous villain. Be warned. I am on my guard."

"If you will have it, then!" cried Gautran, and with a savage shout he threw himself upon Vanbrugh.

So sudden and fierce was the attack that Vanbrugh could not escape from it; but although he was no match for Gautran in strength, he had had, in former years, some experience in wrestling which came to his aid now in this terrible crisis. The struggle that ensued was prolonged and deadly, and while the men were locked in each other's arms, the storm broke immediately over their heads. The thunder pealed above them, the lightning played about their forms.

"You villain!" gasped Vanbrugh, as he felt himself growing weaker. "Have you been paid by the Advocate to do this deed?"

"Yes," answered Gautran, between his clenched teeth; "he is the fiend's agent, and I am his! He bade me kill you. Your last moment has come!"

"Not yet," cried Vanbrugh, and by a supreme and despairing effort he threw Gautran clear from him, and stood again on the defensive.

Simultaneously with the movement a flash of forked lightning struck the tree against which Vanbrugh had been leaning when Gautran first accosted him, and cleft it in twain; and as Gautran was about to spring forward, a huge mass of timber fell upon him with fatal force, and bore him to the earth—where he lay imprisoned, crushed and bleeding to death.

CHAPTER V

FATHER CAPEL DISCOVERS GAUTRAN IN HIS PERIL

FATHER CAPEL was wending his way slowly over the hill from the bedside of the sick woman whom he had attended for two nights in succession. On the first night she was in a state of delirium, and Father Capel could not arouse her to a consciousness of surrounding things. In her delirium she had repeatedly uttered a name which had powerfully interested him, "Madeline! Madeline! my Madeline," she moaned again and again. "Is it possible," thought the priest, "that the girl whose name she utters with agonised affection is the poor child who was so ruthlessly murdered?" On this, the second night, the woman whose last minutes on earth were approaching, was conscious, and she made certain disclosures to Father Capel which, veiled as they were, had grievously disturbed his usually serene mood. She had, also, given him a mission to perform which did not tend to compose his mind. He had promised faithfully to obey her, and they were to meet again within a few hours. To his earnest request that she would pray with him, she had impatiently answered:

"There will be time enough after I have seen the man you have promised to bring with you. I shall live till then."

So he had knelt by her bedside and had prayed for her and for himself, and for all the erring. His compassionate heart had room for them all.

For twenty miles around there was no man better loved than he. His life had been reproachless, and his tender nature never turned from the performance of a good deed, though it entailed suffering and privation upon himself. These were matters not to be considered when duty beckoned to him. A poor man, and one who very often deprived himself of a meal in the cause of charity. A priest in the truest sense of the word.

Seldom, in the course of a long, merciful, and charitable

career, had he met with so much cause to grieve as on the present occasion. In the first place, because it was an added proof to the many he had received that a false step in life, in the taking of which one human being caused another to suffer, was certain to bring at some time or other its own bitter punishment; in the second place, because in this particular instance, the punishment, and the remorse that must surely follow, were as terrible as the mind of man could conceive.

His road lay towards the hill upon which the desperate conflict between John Vanbrugh and Gautran was taking place. There was no occasion for him to cross this hill; by skirting its base he could follow the road he intended to take. But as he approached the spot, the wind bore to him, in moments when the fury of the storm was lulled, cries which sounded in his ears like cries of pain and despair. They were faint, and difficult to ascribe to any precise definite cause; they might be the cries of an animal, but even in that case it was more than likely that Father Capel would have proceeded in their direction. Presently, however, he heard a human cry for help; the word was distinct, and it decided his movements. Without hesitation he began to climb the hill.

As he approached nearer and nearer to the spot on which the struggle was proceeding, there was no longer room to doubt its nature.

“Holy Mother!” murmured the priest, quickening his steps, “will the evil passions of men never be stilled? It seems as if murder were being done here. Grant that I am not too late to avert the crime!”

Then came the terrific lightning-flash, followed immediately by Gautran’s piercing scream as he was struck down by the tree.

“Who calls for help?” cried Father Capel, in a loud voice, but his words were lost in the peals of thunder which shook the earth and made it tremble beneath his feet. When comparative silence reigned, he shouted again:

“Who calls for help? I am a priest, and tender it.”

Gautran’s voice answered him:

“Here—here! I am crushed and dying!”

This appeal was not coherently made, but the groans which accompanied it guided Father Capel to the spot upon which Gautran lay. He felt amid the darkness and shuddered at the touch of blood, and then he clasped Gautran's right hand. The tree had fallen across the murderer's legs, and had so crushed them into the earth that he could not move the lower part of his body; his chest and arms were free. A heavy branch had inflicted a terrible gash on his forehead, and it was from this wound that he was bleeding to death.

"Who are you?" said Father Capel, kneeling by the dying man, "that lies here in this sad condition? I cannot see you. Is this Heaven's deed, or man's?"

"It is Heaven's," gasped Gautran, "and I am justly punished."

"I heard the sounds of a struggle between two men. Are you one of those who were fighting in the midst of this awful darkness?"

"Yes, I am one."

"And the design," continued Father Capel, "was murder. You do not answer me; your silence is sufficient confirmation. Are you hurt much?"

"I am hurt to death. In a few minutes I shall be in eternal fire unless you grant me absolution and forgiveness for my crimes."

"Speak first the truth. Were you set upon, or were you the attacker in this evil combat?"

"I attacked him first."

"Then he may be dead!" exclaimed Father Capel, and rising hastily to his feet, he peered into the darkness, and felt about with his hands, and called aloud to know if the other man was conscious. "This is horrible," said the priest, in deep perplexity, scarcely knowing what it was best to do; "one man dying, another in all likelihood dead."

He turned as if about to go, and Gautran, divining his intention, cried in a tone of agony:

"Do not leave me, father, do not leave me!"

"Truly," murmured the priest, "it seems to me that my present duty is more with the living than the dead." He knelt again by the side of Gautran. "Miserable wretch,

if the man you attacked be dead, you have murdered him, and you have been smitten for your crime. It may not be the only sin that lies upon your soul."

"It is not, it is not," groaned Gautran. "My strength is deserting me; I can hardly speak. Father, is there hope for a murderer? Do not let me die yet. Give me something to revive me. I am fainting."

"I have nothing with me to restore your strength. To go for wine, and for assistance to remove this heavy timber which imprisons you—my weak arms cannot stir it—cannot be accomplished in less than half an hour. It will be best, perhaps, for me to take this course; in the meantime, pray, miserable man, with all the earnestness of your heart and soul, for Divine forgiveness. What is your name?"

"I am Gautran," faintly answered the murderer.

Father Capel's frame shook under the influence of a strong agitation.

"From the bedside of the woman I have left within the hour," he murmured, "to this poor sinner who has but a few minutes to live! The hand of God is visible in it."

He addressed himself to the dying man:

"You are he who was tried for the murder of Madeline, the flower-girl?"

"I am he," moaned Gautran.

"Hearken to me," said Father Capel. "For that crime you were tried and acquitted by an earthly tribunal, which pronounced you innocent. But you are now about to appear before the Divine throne for judgment; and from God nothing can be hidden. He sees into the hearts of men. Who is ready—as you but now admitted to me—to commit one murder, and who, perhaps, has committed it, for, from the silence, I infer that the body of your victim lies at no great distance, will not shrink from committing two. Answer me truly, as you hope for mercy. Were you guilty or innocent of the murder of Madeline?"

"I was guilty," groaned Gautran. "Wretch that I am, I killed her. I loved her, father—I loved her!"

Gautran, from whose lips these words had come amid gasps of agony, could say no more; his senses were fast leaving him.

"Ah me—ah me!" sighed Father Capel; "how shall such a crime be expiated?"

"Father," moaned Gautran, rallying a little, "had I lived till to-morrow, I intended to buy masses for the repose of her soul. I will buy them now, and for my own soul too. I have money. Feel in my pocket; there is gold. Take it all—all—every piece—and tell me I am forgiven."

Father Capel did not attempt to take the money.

"Stolen gold will not buy absolution or the soul's repose," he said sadly. "Crime upon crime—sin upon sin! Gautran, evil spirits have been luring you to destruction."

"I did not steal the gold," gasped Gautran. "It was given to me—freely given."

"Forgiveness you cannot hope for," said Father Capel, "if in these awful moments you swerve from the truth by a hair's-breadth. Confess you stole the gold, and tell me from whom, so that it may be restored."

"May eternal torments be mine if I stole it! Believe me, father—believe me. I speak the truth."

"Who gave it to you, then?"

"The Advocate."

"The Advocate! He who defended you, and so blinded the judgment of men as to cause them to set a murderer loose?"

"Yes; he, and no other man."

"From what motive, Gautran—compassion?"

"No, from fear."

"What reason has he to fear you?"

"I have his secret, as he had mine, and he wished to get rid of me, so that he and I should never meet again. It was for that he gave me the gold."

"What is the nature of this secret which made him fear your presence?"

"He knew me to be guilty."

"What do you say? When he defended you, he knew you to be guilty?"

"Aye, he knew it well."

"Incredible—horrible!" exclaimed Father Capel, raising his hands. "He shared, then, your crime. Yes; though he committed not the deed, his guilt is as heavy as the

guilt of the murderer. How will he atone for it?—how *can* atone for it? And if what I otherwise fear to be true, what pangs of remorse await him!”

A frightful scream from Gautran arrested his further speech.

“Save me, father—save me!” shrieked the wretch. “Send her away! Tell her I repent. See, there—there!—she is creeping upon me, along the tree!”

“What is it you behold amidst the darkness of this appalling night?” asked Father Capel, crossing himself.

“It is Madeline—her spirit that will never, never leave me! Will you not be satisfied, you, with my punishment? Is not my death enough for you? You fiend—you fiend! I will strangle you if you come closer. Have mercy—mercy! You are a priest; have you no power over her? Then what is the use of prayer? It is a mockery—a mockery! My eyes are filled with blood! Ah!”

Then all was silent.

“Gautran,” whispered Father Capel, “take this cross in your hand; put it to your lips and repeat the words I say. Gautran, do you hear me? No sound—no sound! He has gone to his account, unrepentant and unforgiven!”

Father Capel rose to his feet.

“I will seek assistance at once; there is another to be searched for. Ah, terrible, terrible night! Heaven have mercy upon us!”

And with a heart overburdened with grief, the good priest left the spot to seek for help.

CHAPTER VI

THE WRITTEN CONFESSION

DURING the whole of this interview John Vanbrugh had lain concealed within two or three yards of the fallen tree, and had heard every word that had passed between Gautran and Father Capel. For a few moments after he had thrown Gautran from him he was dazed and exhausted by the struggle in which he had been engaged, and by the crashing of the timber which had

saved him from his deadly foe. Gradually he realised what had occurred, and when Father Capel's voice reached his ears he resolved not to discover himself, and to be a silent witness of what transpired.

In this decision lay safety for himself and absolute immunity, for Gautran knew nothing of him, not even his name, and to be dragged into the light, to be made to give evidence of the scene in which he had been a principal actor, would have seriously interfered with his plan of action respecting the Advocate.

Favoured by the night, he had no difficulty in concealing himself, and he derived an inward satisfaction from the reflection that he might turn even the tragic and unexpected event that had occurred to his own immediate advantage. He had not been seriously hurt in the conflict; a few bruises and scratches comprised the injuries he had received.

Among his small gifts lay the gift of mimicry; he could imitate another man's voice to perfection; and when Father Capel left Gautran for the purpose of obtaining assistance, an idea crossed his mind which he determined to carry out. He waited until he was assured that Father Capel was entirely out of hearing, and then he stepped from his hiding-place, and knelt by the side of Gautran. Having now no fear of his enemy, he placed his ear to Gautran's heart and listened.

"He breathes," he muttered, "there is yet a little life left in him."

He raised Gautran's head upon his knee, and taking his flask of brandy from his pocket, he poured some of the liquor down the dying man's throat. It revived him; he opened his eyes languidly; but he had not strength enough left in him to utter more than a word or two at the time.

"I have returned, Gautran," said John Vanbrugh, imitating the voice of the priest; "I had it not in my heart to desert you in your last moments. The man you fought with is dead, and in his pocket I found this flask of brandy. It serves one good purpose; it will give you time to earn salvation. You have two murders upon your soul. Are you prepared to do as I bid you?"

"Yes," replied Gautran.

"Answer my questions, then. What do you know of the man whom you have slain?"

"Nothing."

"Was he, then, an absolute stranger to you?"

"Yes."

"You do not even know his name?"

"No."

"There is no time to inquire into your reasons for attacking him, for I perceive from your breathing that your end is very near, and the precious moments must not be wasted. It is your soul—your soul—that has to be saved! And there is only one way—the guilty must be punished. You have met your punishment. Heaven's lightning has struck you down. These gold pieces which I now take from your pocket shall be expended in masses. Rest easy, rest easy, Gautran. There is but one thing for you to do—and then you will have made atonement. You hear me—you understand me?"

"Yes—quick—quick!"

"To die, leaving behind you no record of the guilt of your associate—of the Advocate who, knowing you to be a murderer, deliberately defeated the ends of justice—will be to provoke Divine anger against you. There is no hope for pardon in that case. Can you write?"

"No."

"Your name, with my assistance, you could trace?"

"Perhaps."

"I will write a confession which you must sign. Then you shall receive absolution."

He poured a few drops of brandy into Gautran's mouth, and they were swallowed with difficulty. After this he allowed Gautran's head to rest upon the earth, and tore from his pocket-book some sheets of blank paper, upon which, with much labour, he wrote the following:

"I, Gautran, the woodman, lately tried for the murder of Madeline, the flower-girl, being now upon the point of death, and conscious that I have only a few minutes to live, and being in full possession of my reason, hereby make oath, and swear:

"That being thrown into prison, awaiting my trial, I believed there was no escape from the doom I justly merited, for the reason that I was guilty of the murder.

“That some days before my trial was to take place, the Advocate who defended me voluntarily undertook to prove to my judges that I was innocent of the crime I committed.

“That with this full knowledge he conducted my case with such ability that I was set free and pronounced innocent.

“That on the night of my acquittal, after midnight had struck, and when every person but himself in the House of White Shadows was asleep, I secretly visited him in his study, and remained with him some time.

“That he gave me food and money, and bade me go my way.

“That I am ignorant of the motives which induced him to whom I was a perfect stranger, to deliberately defeat the ends of justice.

“That the proof that he knew me to be guilty lies in the fact that I made a full confession to him.

“To which I solemnly swear, being about to appear before a just God to answer for my crime. I pray for forgiveness and mercy.

“Signed——.”

And here John Vanbrugh left a space for Gautran's name. He read the statement to Gautran, who was now fast sinking, and then he raised the dying man's head in his arms, and holding the pencil in the almost nerveless fingers, assisted him to trace the name “GAUTRAN.”

This was no sooner accomplished than Gautran, with a wild scream, fell back.

John Vanbrugh lost not another moment. With an exultant smile he placed the fatal evidence in his pocket, and prepared to depart. As he did so he heard the voices of men who were ascending the hill.

“This paper,” thought Vanbrugh, as he crept softly away in an opposite direction, “is worth, I should say, at least half the Advocate's fortune. It is the ruin of his life and career, and, if he does not purchase it of me on my own terms, let him look to himself.”

When Father Capel, with the men he had summoned to his assistance, arrived at the spot upon which Gautran lay, the murderer was dead.

BOOK VI.—A RECORD OF THE PAST

CHAPTER I

THE DISCOVERY OF THE MANUSCRIPT

ALL was silent in the House of White Shadows. Strange as was the drama that was in progress within its walls it found no open expression, and to the Advocate, seated alone in his study, was about to be unfolded a record of events long buried in the past, the disclosure of which had not, up to this moment, been revealed to man. During the afternoon, the Advocate had said to Christian Almer:

“Now that I have leisure, I intend, with your permission, to devote some time to your father’s works. In his day, certainly for a number of years, he was celebrated, and well known in many countries, and I have heard surprise expressed that a career which promised to shed lasting lustre upon the name you bear seemed suddenly to come to an end. Of this abrupt break in the labours of an eminent man there is no explanation—as to what led to it, and in what way it was broken off. I may chance upon the reason of a singular and complete diversion from a pursuit which he loved. It will interest me, if you will give me permission to search among his papers.”

“A permission,” rejoined Christian Almer, “freely accorded. Everything in the study is at your disposal. For my own part the impressions of my childhood are of such a nature as to render distasteful the records of my father’s labours. But you are a student and a man of deeper observation and research than myself. You may unearth something of value. I place all my father’s manuscripts

at your unreserved disposal. Pray, read them if you care to do so, and use them in any way you may desire."

Thus it happened that, two hours before midnight, the Advocate, after looking through a number of manuscripts, most of them in an incomplete shape, came upon some written pages, the opening lines of which exercised upon him a powerful fascination. The only heading of these pages was, "A FAITHFUL RECORD." And it was made in the following strain:

CHAPTER II

CHRISTIAN ALMER'S FATHER

"**I**T devolves upon me, Ernest Christian Almer, as a duty, to set down here, in a brief form, before I die, the record of certain events in my life which led me to the commission of a crime. Whether justifiable or not—whether this which I call a crime may be otherwise designated as an accident or as the execution of a just punishment for trust and friendship betrayed—is for others to determine.

"It is probable that no human eye will read what I am about to write until I am dead; but if it should be brought to light in my lifetime I am ready to bear the consequences of my act. The reason why I myself do nothing to assist directly in the discovery (except in so far as making this record and placing it without concealment among my manuscripts) is that I may in that way be assisting in bringing into the life of my dear son, Christian Almer, a stigma and a reproach which will be a cause of suffering to him. If it should happen that many years elapse before these lines fall into the hands of a human being, it may perhaps be for the best. What is done is done, and cannot be recalled. Even had I the power to bring the dead to life I doubt whether I should avail myself of it.

"My name is not unknown to the small world in which I live and move, and I once cherished a hope that I should succeed in making it famous. That hope is now like a flower burnt to ashes, never more to blossom. It proves

the vanity of ambition upon which we pride ourselves and which we imbue with false nobility.

"As a lad I was almost morbidly tender in my nature; I shrank from giving pain to living creature; the ordinary pursuits of childhood, in which cruelty to insects forms so prominent a feature, were to me revolting; to strip even a flower of its leaves was in my eyes a cruel proceeding. And yet I have lived to take a human life.

"My earliest aspiration was to win a name in literature. Every book I read and admired assisted in making this youthful aspiration a fixed purpose when I became a man. Often, as I read the last words of a book which had fired my imagination, would I think, and sometimes say aloud, 'Gladly would I die were I capable of writing a work so good, so grand as this.'

"My parents were rich, and allowed me to follow my bent. When they died I was left sole heir to their wealth. I had not to struggle as poorer men in the profession to which I resolved to devote myself have had to do. So much the worse for me perhaps—but that now matters little. Whether the books I hoped to write would be eagerly sought after or not was of no moment to me. What I desired was to produce; for the rest, as to being successful or unsuccessful, I was equal to either fortune.

"I made many friends and acquaintances, who grew to learn that they could use and enjoy my house as their own. In setting this down I lay no claim to unusual generosity; it was on my part simply the outcome of a nature that refused to become a slave to rigid forms of hospitality. The trouble entailed would have been too great, and I declined to undertake it. I chose to employ my hours after my own fashion—the fashion of solitude. I found great pleasure in it, and to see my friends around me without feeling myself called upon to sacrifice my time for their enjoyment, knowing (as they well knew) that they were welcome to the best my wealth and means could supply them with—this added to my pleasure a peculiar charm. They were satisfied, and so was I; and only in one instance was my hospitality abused and my friendship betrayed. But had I been wise, this one instance would never have occurred to destroy the hopes of my life.

"Although it is running somewhat ahead of the sequence of events, I may mention here the name of the man who proved false to friendship. It was M. Gabriel. He was almost young enough to be my son, and when I first knew him he was a boy and I was a man. He was an artist, with rare talents, and at the outset of his career I assisted him, for, like the majority of artists, he was poor. This simple mention of him will be sufficient for the present.

"As when I was a lad I took no delight in the pleasures of lads of my own age, so when I was a man I did not go the way of men in that absorbing passion to which is given the name of Love. Those around me were drawn into the net which natural impulse and desire spread for mankind. There was no credit in this; it was simply that it did not happen. I was by no means a woman-hater, but it would seem as if the pursuits to which I was devoted were too engrossing to admit of a rival. So I may say what few can say—that I had passed my fortieth year, and had never loved.

"My turn came, however.

"Among my guests were the lady who afterwards became my wife, and her parents. A sweet and beautiful lady, twenty-five years my junior. My unhappiness and ruin sprang from the chance which brought us together—as did her wretchedness and misery. In this I was more to blame than she—much more to blame. In the ordinary course of a life which had reached beyond its middle age I should have acquired sufficient experience to learn that youth should mate with youth—that nature has its laws which it is dangerous to trifle with. But such experience did not come to me. At forty-five years of age I was as unlearned as a child in matters of the heart; I had no thought of love or marriage, and the youngest man of my acquaintance would have laughed at my simplicity had the opportunity been afforded him of seeing my inner life. It was not the fault of the young lady that she knew nothing of this simplicity. No claim whatever had I to demand to be judged by special and exceptional rules. She had a perfect right to judge me as any other man of my age would have been judged. All that can be said of it was

that it was most unfortunate for her and for me. If it should happen (which is not unlikely, for the unforeseen is always occurring) that these pages should be read by a man who is contemplating marriage with one young enough to be his daughter, I would advise him to pause and submit his case to the test of natural reason; for if both live, there must come a time when nature will take its revenge for the transgression. The glamour of the present is very alluring, but it is the duty of the wiser and the riper of the twain to consider the future, which will press more hardly upon the woman than upon the man. With the fashion of things as regards the coupling of the sexes I have nothing to do; fashions are artificial and often most mischievous. Frequently, when the deeper laws of nature are involved, they are destructive and fatal.

"It was my misfortune that during the visit of the young lady and her parents, the father, an old and harmless gentleman, met his death through an accident while he, I, and other gentlemen were riding. In my house he died.

"It occasioned me distress and profound sorrow, and I felt myself in some way accountable, though the fault was none of mine. Before his death he and I had private confidences, in which he asked me to look after his affairs, and if, as he feared, they were in an embarrassed state, to act as protector to his daughter. I gave him the promise readily, and, when he died, I took a journey for the purpose of ascertaining how the widow and the orphan were circumstanced. I found that they were literally beggars. As gently as I could I broke the news to them. The mother understood it; the daughter scarcely knew its meaning. Her charming, artless ignorance of the consequences of poverty deeply interested me, and I resolved in my mind how I could best serve her and render her future a happy one.

"Speaking as I am in a measure to my own soul, I will descend to no duplicity. That I was entirely unselfish in my desire that her life should be bright and free from anxieties with which she could not cope is true; but none the less true is it that, for the first time, I felt myself under the dominion of a passion deeper and more significant than I had ever felt for woman. It was love, I believe,

but love in which there was reason. For I took myself to task ; I set my age and hers before me ; I did this on paper, and as I gazed at the figures I said, 'Absurd ; it is not in nature, and I must fight it down.' I did wrestle with it, and although I did not succeed in vanquishing it, I was sufficiently master of myself to keep the struggle hidden in my own breast.

"How, then, did this hapless lady become my wife? Not, in the first instance, through any steps voluntarily and unreasoningly taken by myself. I had firmly resolved to hold my feelings in check. It was the mother who accomplished that upon which she had set her heart. I may speak freely. This worldly mother has been long dead, and my confession cannot harm her. It was she who ruined at least the happiness of one life, and made me what I am.

"Needless here to recount the arts by which she worked to the end she desired ; needless to speak of the deceits she practised to make me believe her daughter loved me. It may be that the fault was mine, and that I was too ready to believe. Sufficient to say that we fell into the snare she prepared for us ; that, intoxicated by the prospect of an earthly heaven, I accepted the meanings she put on her daughter's reserve and apparent coldness, and that, once engaged in the enterprise, I was animated by the ardour of my own heart, in which I allowed the flower of love to grow to fruition. So we were married, and with no doubt of the future I set out with my wife on our bridal tour. She was both child and wife to me, and I solemnly resolved and most earnestly desired to do my duty by her.

"Before we were many days away news arrived that my wife's mother had met with an accident, in a part of the grounds which was being beautified by my workmen according to plans I had prepared for the pleasure of my young bride—an accident so serious that death could not be averted. In sadness we returned to the villa. My wife's coldness I ascribed to grief—to no other cause. And, indeed, apart from the sorrow I felt at the dreadful news, I was myself overwhelmed for a time by the fatality which had deprived my wife of her parents within so short a time on my estate, and while they were my guests.

'But it will pass away,' I thought, 'and I will be parents, lover, husband, to the sweet flower who has given her happiness into my keeping.' When we arrived at the villa, her mother was dead.

"I allowed my wife's grief to take its natural course; seeing that she wished for solitude, I did not intrude upon her sorrow. I had to study this young girl's feelings and impulses; it was my duty to be tender and considerate to her. I was wise, and thoughtful, and loving, as I believed, and I spared no effort to comfort without disturbing her. 'Time will console her,' I thought, 'and then we will begin a new life. She will learn to look upon me not only as a husband, but as a protector who will fully supply the place of those she has lost.' I was patient—very patient—and I waited for the change. It never came.

"She grew more and more reserved towards me; and still I waited, and still was patient. Not for a moment did I lose sight of my duty.

"But after a long time had passed I began to question myself—I began to doubt whether I had not allowed myself to be deceived. Is it possible, I asked myself, that she married me without loving me? When this torturing doubt arose I thrust it indignantly from me; it was as though I was casting a stain upon her truth and purity.

CHAPTER III

A DISHONOURABLE CONCEALMENT

"I WILL not recount the continual endeavours I made to win my wife to cheerfulness and a better frame of mind. Sufficient to say that they were unsuccessful, and that many and many a time I gave up the attempt in despair, to renew it again under the influence of false hopes. Unhappy and disheartened, the pursuits in which I had always taken delight afforded me now no pleasure, and though I sought relief in solitude and study, I did not find it. My peace of mind was utterly wrecked. There was, however, in the midst of my wretchedness, one ray of light. In the course of a little while a child would

be born to us, and this child might effect what I was unable to accomplish. When my wife pressed her baby to her breast, when it drew life from her bosom, she might be recalled to a sense of duty and of some kind of affection which I was ready to accept in the place of that thorough devoted love which I bore to her, and which I had hoped she would bear to me.

“Considering this matter with as much wisdom as I could bring to my aid, I recognised the desirability of surrounding my wife with signs of pleasant and even joyful life. Gloomy parents are cursed with gloomy children. I would fill my house once more with friends; my wife should move in an atmosphere of cheerfulness; there should be music, laughter, sunny looks, happy voices. These could not fail to influence for good both my wife and our little one soon to be born.

“I called friends around me, and I took special care that there should be many young people among them. Their presence, however, did not at first arouse my wife from her melancholy, and it was not until the man whose name I have already mentioned—M. Gabriel—arrived that I noticed in her any change for the better.

“He came, and I introduced him to my wife, believing them to have been hitherto strangers to each other. I had no reason to believe otherwise when I presented M. Gabriel to her; had they met before, it would have been but honest that one or both should have made me acquainted with the fact. They did not, by direct or indirect word, and I had, therefore, no cause for suspicion.

“Things went on as usual for a week or two after M. Gabriel’s arrival, and then I noticed with joy that my wife was beginning to grow more cheerful. My happiness was great. I have been too impatient, I thought, with this young girl. The shock of losing her parents, one after another, under circumstances so distressing, was sufficient to upset a stronger mind than hers. How unwise in me that I should have tormented myself as I had been doing for so many months past! And how unjust to her that, because she was sorrowful and silent, I should have doubted her love for me! But all was well now; comfort had come to her bruised heart, and the book of

happiness was not closed to me as I had feared. A terrible weight, a gnawing grief, were lifted from me. For I could imagine no blacker treason than that a woman should deliberately deceive a man into the belief that she loved him, and that she should marry him under such conditions. My wife had not done this; I had wronged her. Most fervently did I thank Heaven that I had discovered my error before it was too late to repair it.

"I saw that my wife took pleasure in M. Gabriel's society, and I made him as free of my house as if it had been his own. He had commissions to execute, pictures to paint.

"'Paint them here,' I said to him, 'you bring happiness to us. I look upon you as though you belonged to my family.'

"In the summer-house was a room which he used as a studio; no artist could have desired a better, and M. Gabriel said he had never been able to paint as well as he was doing in my house. It gladdened me to observe that my wife, who had for a little while been reserved towards M. Gabriel, looked upon him now as a sister might look upon a brother. I encouraged their intimacy, and was grateful to M. Gabriel for accepting my hospitality in the free spirit in which it was tendered. He expressed a wish to paint my wife's portrait, and I readily consented. My wife gave him frequent sittings, sometimes in my company, sometimes alone. And still no word was spoken to acquaint me with the fact that my wife and he had known each other before they met in my house.

"My child was born—a boy. My happiness would have been complete had my wife shown me a little more affection; but again, after the birth of our child, it dawned upon me that she cared very little for me, and that the feelings she entertained for me in no wise resembled those which a loving woman should feel towards a husband who was indefatigable, as indeed I was, in his efforts to promote her happiness. Even then it did not strike me that she was happier in M. Gabriel's society than she was in mine. The truth, however, was now to be made known to me. It reached me through the idle tittle-tattling of one of my guests; of my own prompting I doubt whether

I should ever have discovered it. I overheard this lady making some injurious observations respecting my wife; no man's name was mentioned, but I heard enough to cause me to resolve to hear more, and to put an end at once to the utterances of a malicious tongue.

"During my life, in matters of great moment, I have seldom acted upon impulse, and the value of calm deliberation after sudden excitement of feeling has frequently been made apparent to me.

"I sought this lady, and told her that I had overheard the remarks she had made on the previous day; that I was profoundly impressed by them, and intended to know what foundation there was for even a breath of scandal. I had some difficulty in bringing her to the point, but I was determined, and would be satisfied with no evasions.

"‘I love my wife, madam,’ I said, ‘too well to be content with half words and innuendoes, which in their effect are worse than open accusations.’

"‘Accusations!’ exclaimed the lady. ‘Good Heavens! I have brought none.’

"‘It is for that reason I complain,’ I said; ‘accusations can be met, and are by no means so much to be feared as idle words which affect the honour of those who are the subject of them.’

"‘I merely repeated,’ then said the lady, ‘what others have been saying for a long time past.’

"‘And what have others been saying for a long time past, madam?’ I asked, with an outward calmness which deceived her into the belief that I was not taking the matter seriously to heart.

"‘I am sure it is very foolish of them,’ said the lady, ‘and that there is nothing in it. But people are so mischievous, and place such dreadful constructions upon things! It is, after all, only natural that when, after a long separation, young lovers meet, they should feel a little tender towards each other, even though one of them has got married in the interval. We all go through such foolish experiences, and when we grow as old as you and I are, we laugh at them.’

"‘Probably, madam,’ I said, still with exceeding calmness; ‘but before we can laugh with any genuineness or

enjoyment, it is necessary to have some knowledge of the cause of our mirth. When young lovers meet, you said, after a long separation, it is natural they should feel a tenderness towards each other. But we are speaking of my wife.'

" 'Yes,' she replied, 'of your wife, and I am sure you are too sensible a man—so much older than that sweet creature!—to make any unnecessary bother about it.'

" She knew well how to plant daggers in my heart.

" 'My wife, then, is one of those young lovers? You really must answer me, madam. These are, after all, but foolish experiences.'

" 'I am glad you are taking it so sensibly,' she rejoined. 'Yes, your wife is one of the young lovers.'

" 'And the other, madam.'

" 'Why, who else should it be but M. Gabriel?'

" I did not speak for a few moments. The shock was so severe that I required time to recover some semblance of composure.

" 'My mind is much relieved,' I said. 'There is not the slightest foundation for scandal, and I trust that this interview will put an effectual stop to it. My wife and M. Gabriel have not been long acquainted. They met each other for the first time in this house.'

" 'Ah,' cried the lady very vivaciously, 'you want to deceive me now; but it is nonsense. Your wife and M. Gabriel have known each other for many years. They were once affianced.' Had you not stepped in, there is no knowing what might have occurred. It is much better as it is—I am sure you think so. What can be worse for a young and beautiful creature than to marry a poor and struggling artist? M. Gabriel is very talented, but he is very poor. By the time he is a middle-aged man he may have made his way in the world, and then his little romance will be forgotten—quite forgotten. I dare say you can look back to the time when you were as young as he is, and can recall somebody you were madly in love with, but of whom you never think, except by the merest chance. These things are so common, you see. And now don't let us talk any more about it.'

" I had no desire to exchange another word with the

lady on the subject; I allowed her to rest in the belief that I had been acquainted with the whole affair, and did not wish it to get about. She promised me never to speak of it again to her friends in any injurious way, said it was a real pleasure to see what a sensible view I took of the matter, and our interview was at an end.

“I had learnt all. At length, at length my eyes were opened, and the perfidy which had been practised towards me was revealed. All was explained. My wife’s constant coldness, her insensibility to the affectionate advances I had made towards her, her pleasure at meeting her lover—the unworthy picture lay before my sight. There was no longer any opportunity for self-deception. Had I not recognised and acknowledged the full extent of the treason, I should have become base in my own esteem. It was not that they had been lovers—that knowledge in itself would have been hard to bear—but that they should have concealed it from me, that they should have met in my presence as strangers, that they should have tacitly agreed to trick me!—for hours I could not think with calmness upon these aspects of the misery which had been forced upon me. For she, my wife, was in the first instance responsible for our marriage; she could have refused me. I was in utter ignorance of a love which, during all these years, had been burning in her heart, and making her life and mine a torture. Had she been honest, had she been true, she would have said to me: ‘I love another; how, then, can I accept the love you offer me, and how can you hope for a return? If circumstances compel me to marry you there must be no concealment, no treason. You must take me as I am, and never, never make my coldness the cause of reproach or unhappiness.’ Yes, this much she might have said to me when I offered her my name—a name upon which there had hitherto been no stain and no dishonour. I should not have married her; I should have acted as a father towards her; I should have conducted her to the arms of her lover, and into their lives and mine would not have crept this infamy, this blight, this shame which even death cannot efface.

“Of such a nature were my thoughts during the day.

“Then came the resolve to be sure before I took action

in the matter. The evidence of my own senses should convince me that in my own house my wife and her lover were playing a base part, were systematically deceiving me and laughing at me.

“Of this man, this friend, whom I had taken to my heart, my horror and disgust were complete. I, whose humane instincts had in my youth been made the sport of my companions, who shrank from inflicting the slightest injury upon the meanest creature that crawled upon the earth, who would not even strip the leaves from a flower, found myself now transformed. Had M. Gabriel been in my presence at any moment during these hours of agonising thought, I should have torn him limb from limb and rejoiced in my cruelty. So little do we know ourselves.

CHAPTER IV

M. GABRIEL IS DISMISSED

“**I** WAS up the whole of the night; I did not close my eyes, and when morning broke I had schooled myself to the task before me—to assure myself of the truth and the extent of the shame.

“I kept watch, and did not betray myself to them, and what I saw filled me with amazement at my blindness and credulity. That my wife was not guilty, that she was not faithless to me in the ordinary acceptation of the term, was no palliation of her conduct.

“Steadfastly I kept before me one unalterable resolve. In the eyes of the world the name I bore should not be dishonoured, if by any means it could be prevented. We would keep our shame and our deep unhappiness within our own walls. In the light of this resolve it was impossible that I could challenge M. Gabriel; he must go unpunished by me. My name should not be dragged through the mire, to become a byeword for pity.

“By degrees, upon one excuse and another, I got rid of my visitors, and there remained in the villa only I, my wife and child, and M. Gabriel. Then, in M. Gabriel’s

studio, I broke in upon the lovers, and found my wife in tears.

“For a moment or two I gazed upon them in silence, and they, who had risen in confusion when I presented myself, confronted me also in silence, waiting for the storm of anger which they expected to burst from me, an outraged husband. They were mistaken; I was outwardly calm.

“‘Madam,’ I inquired, addressing my wife, ‘may I inquire the cause of your tears?’

“She did not reply; M. Gabriel did. ‘Let me explain,’ he said, but I would not allow him to proceed.

“‘I do not need you,’ I said, ‘to interpose between man and wife. I may presently have something to say to you. Till then, be silent.’ Again I addressed my wife, and asked her why she was weeping.

“‘They are not the first tears I have shed,’ she replied, ‘since I entered this unhappy house.’

“‘I am aware of it, madam,’ I replied; ‘yet the house was not an unhappy one before you entered it. Honour, and truth, and faithfulness were its characteristics, and towards no man or woman who has received hospitality within these walls has any kind of treachery been practised by me, its master and your husband. Tears are a sign of grief, and suffering from it, as I perceive you are, I ask you why have you not sought consolation from the man whose name you bear, and whose life since you and he first met has had but one aim—to render you happy.’

“‘You cannot comfort me,’ she said.

“‘Can he?’ I asked, pointing to M. Gabriel.

“‘You insult me,’ she said with great dignity. ‘I will leave you. We can speak of this in private.’

“‘You will not leave me,’ I said, ‘and we will not speak of this in private, until after some kind of explanation is afforded me from your own lips and the lips of your friend. In saying I insult you, there is surely a mistaken idea in your mind as to what is due from you to me. M. Gabriel, whom I once called a friend, is here, enjoying my hospitality, of which I trust he has had no reason to complain. I find you in tears by his side, and he, by his attitude, endeavouring to console you. When I ask you, in

his presence, why, being in grief, you do not come to me for consolation, you reply that I cannot comfort you. Yet you were accepting comfort from him, who is not your husband. It suggests itself to me that if an insult has been passed it has been passed upon me. I do not, however, receive it as such, for if an insult has been offered to me, M. Gabriel is partly responsible for it, and it is only between equals that such an indignity can be offered.'

" 'Equals!' cried M. Gabriel; he understood my words in the sense in which I intended them. 'I am certainly your equal.'

" 'It has to be proved,' I retorted. 'I use the term in so far as it affects honour and upright conduct between man and man. You can bring against me no accusation of having failed in those respects in my behaviour towards you. It has to be seen whether I can in truth bring such an accusation against you, and if I can substantiate it by evidence which the commonest mind would not reject, you are not my equal. I see that this plain and honest reasoning disturbs you; it should not without sufficient cause. Something more. If in addition I can prove that you have violated my hospitality, you are not only not my equal, but you have descended to a depth of baseness to describe which I can find no fitting terms.'

" He grew hot at this. 'I decline to be present any longer,' he said, 'at an interview conducted in such a manner.' And he attempted to leave me, but I stood in his way, and would not permit him to pass.

" 'From this moment,' I said, 'I discharge myself of all duties towards you as your host. You are no longer my guest, and you will remain at this interview during my pleasure.'

" He made another attempt to leave the room, and as he accompanied it by violence, I seized his arms, and threw him to the ground. He rose, and stood trembling before me.

" 'I make no excuse, madam,' I said to my wife, 'for the turn this scene has taken. It is unseemly for men to brawl in presence of a lady, but there are occasions when of two evils the least must be chosen. Should I find myself mistaken, I shall give to M. Gabriel the amplest

apology he could desire. Let me recall to your mind the day on which M. Gabriel first entered my gates as my guest. I brought him to you, and presented him to you as a friend whom I esteemed, and whom I wished you also to esteem. You received him as a stranger, and I had no reason to suspect that he and you had been intimate friends, and that you were already well known to each other. You allowed me to remain in ignorance of this fact. Was it honest?’

“‘It was not honest,’ she replied.

“‘It made me happy,’ I continued, ‘to see, after the lapse of a few days, that you found pleasure in his society, and I regarded him in the light of a brother to you. I trusted him implicitly, and although, madam, you and I have been most unhappy, I had no suspicion that there was any guilt in this, as I believed, newly-formed friendship.’

“‘There was no guilt in it,’ she said very firmly.

“‘I receive your assurance, and believe it in the sense in which you offer it. But in my estimation the word I use is the proper word. In the concealment from me of a fact with which you or he should have hastened to make me acquainted; in the secret confidences necessarily involved in the carrying out of such an intimacy as yours; there was treachery from wife to husband, from friend to friend, and in that treachery there was guilt. By an accident, within the past month, a knowledge has come to me of a shameful scandal which, had I not nipped it in the bud, would have brought open disgrace upon my name and house—but the secret disgrace remains, and you have brought it into my family.’

“‘A shameful scandal!’ she exclaimed, and her white face grew whiter. ‘Who has dared——’

“‘The world has dared, madam, the world over whose tongue we have no control. The nature of the intimacy existing between you and M. Gabriel, far exceeding the limits of friendship, has provoked remark and comment from many of your guests, and we who should have been the first to know it, have been the last. From a lady stopping in my house I learnt that you and M. Gabriel were lovers before you and I met—that you were affianced,

Madam, had you informed me of this fact you would have spared yourself the deepest unhappiness under which any human being can suffer. For then you and I would not have been bound to each other by a tie which death alone can sever. I have, at all events, the solace which right doing sometimes sheds upon a wounded heart; that solace cannot unhappily be yours. You have erred consciously, and innocent though you proclaim yourself, you have brought shame upon yourself and me. I pity you, but cannot help you further than by the action I intend to take of preventing the occurrence of a deeper shame and a deeper disgrace falling upon me. For M. Gabriel I have no feelings but those of utter abhorrence. I request him to remove himself immediately from my presence and from this house. This evening he will send for his paintings, which shall be delivered to his order. They will be placed in this summer-house. And in your presence madam, I give M. Gabriel the warning that if at any time, or under any circumstances, he intrudes himself within these walls, he will do so at his own peril. The protection which my honour—not safe in your keeping, madam—needs I shall while I live be able to supply.’

“This, in substance, is all that took place while my wife was with us. When she was gone I gave instructions that M. Gabriel’s paintings and property should be brought to the summer-house immediately, and I informed him of my intentions regarding them and the room he had used as a study. He replied that I would have to give him a more satisfactory explanation of my conduct. I took no notice of the threat, and I carried out my resolve—which converted the study into a tomb in which my honour was buried. And on the walls of the study I caused to be inscribed the words ‘The Grave of Honour.’

“On the evening of that day my wife sent for me, and in the presence of Denise, our faithful servant, heard my resolve with reference to our future life, and acquainted me with her own. The gates would never again be opened to friends. Our life was to be utterly secluded, and she had determined never to quit her rooms unless for exercise in the grounds at such times as I was absent from them.

“ ‘After to-night,’ she said, ‘I will never open my lips to you, nor, willingly, will I ever again listen to your voice.’

“In this interview I learnt the snare, set by my wife’s mother, into which we both had fallen.

“I left my wife, and our new life commenced—a life with hearts shut to love or forgiveness. But I had done my duty, and would bear with strength and resignation the unmerited misfortunes with which I was visited. Not my wife’s, I repeat, the fault alone. I should have been wiser, and should have known—apart from any consideration of M. Gabriel—that my habits, my character, my tastes, my age, were entirely unsuitable to the fair girl I had married. I come now to the event which has rendered this record necessary.

CHAPTER V

THE THIEF IN THE NIGHT

“THE impressions left upon me by the tragic occurrence I am about to narrate have, strangely enough, given me a confused idea as to the exact date upon which it took place, but I am correct in saying that it was within a month of the agreement entered into between my wife and myself that we should live separate lives under the same roof.

“I expected to receive a challenge from M. Gabriel, a challenge which for the reason I have given—that I would not afford the world an opportunity of discussing my private affairs—I firmly resolved not to accept. To my surprise no such challenge reached me, and I indulged the hope that M. Gabriel had removed himself forever from us. It was not so.

“The night was wild and dark. The wind was sweeping round the house; the rain was falling. I had resumed my old habits, and was awake in my study, in which I am now writing. I did no intelligent work during those sad days. If I forced myself to write, I invariably tore up the sheets when I read them with a clearer mind. My

studies afforded me neither profit nor relief. The occupation which claimed me was that of brooding over the circumstances attendant upon my wooing and my marriage. For ever brooding. Walking to and fro, dwelling upon each little detail of my intimacy with my girl-wife, and revolving in my mind whether I could have prevented what had occurred—whether, if I had done this or that, I could have averted the misery in which our lives were wrapt. It was a profitless occupation, but I could not tear myself from it. There was a morbid fascination in it which held me fast. That it harrowed me, tortured me, made me smart and bleed, mattered not. It clung to me, and I to it. Thus do we hug our misery to our bosoms, and inflict upon ourselves the most intolerable sufferings.

“I strove to escape from it, to fix my mind upon some abstruse subject, upon some difficult study, but, like a demon to whom I had sold my soul, it would not be denied. There intruded always this one picture—the face of a baby-boy, mine, my dear son, lying asleep in his mother’s arms. Let me say here that I never harboured the thought of depriving my wife of this precious consolation, that never by the slightest effort have I endeavoured to estrange him from her. The love he bore to me—and I thank Heaven that he grew to love me—sprang from his own heart, which also must have been sorely perplexed and have endured great pain in the estrangement that existed between his parents. Well, this pretty baby-face always intruded itself—this soul which I had brought into life lay ever before me, weighted with myriad mysterious and strange suggestions. It might live to accomplish great and noble deeds—it might live to inspire to worthy deeds—it might become a saviour of men, a patriot, an emancipator. And but for me, it would never have been. Even the supreme tribulation of his parents’ lives might be productive of some great actions which would bring a blessing upon mankind. In that case it was good to suffer.

“After some time—not in those days, but later on—this thought became a consolation to me, although it troubled and perplexed me to think whether the birth of

a soul which was destined to shine as a star among men was altogether a matter of chance.

"A dark, stormy night. I created voices in the sweeping of the wind. They spoke to me in groans, in whispers, in loud shrieks. Was it fancy that inspired the wail, 'To-night, to-night shall be your undoing!'

"Midnight struck. I paced to and fro, listening to the voices of the wind. Presently another sound—a sound not created by my imagination—came to my ears. It was as though something heavy had fallen in the grounds. Perhaps a tree had been blown down. Or did it proceed from another cause, which warned me of danger?

"I hastened immediately into the grounds. The sense of danger exhilarated me. I was in a mood which courted death as a boon. Willingly would I have gone out to meet it, as a certain cure for the anguish of my soul. Thus I believe it is sometimes with soldiers, and they become heroes by force of desperation.

"I could see nothing. I was about to return, when a moving object arrested my purpose. I sprang towards it—threw myself upon it. And in my arms I clasped the body of a man, just recovering consciousness from a physical hurt.

"I did not speak a word. I lifted the body in my arms—it had not yet sufficient strength to repel me—and carried it into my study. The moment the light of my lamps shone on the face of the man I recognised him. It was M. Gabriel.

"I laughed with savage delight as I placed him on a couch. 'You villain—you villain!' I muttered. 'Your last hour, or mine, has come. This night, one or both of us shall die!'

"I drew my chair before the couch, so that his eyes, when he opened them, should rest upon my face. He was recovering consciousness, but very slowly. 'I could kill you here,' I said aloud, 'and no man would be the wiser. But I will first have speech with you.' His eyelids quivered, opened, and we were gazing at each other face to face. The sight of me confounded him for a while, but presently he realised the position of affairs and he strove to rise. I thrust him back fiercely.

“ ‘Stay you there,’ I said, ‘until I learn your purpose. You have entered my house as a thief, and you have given your life into my hands. I told you, if you ever intruded yourself within these walls, that you would do so at your peril. What brought you here? Are you a would-be thief or murderer? You foul betrayer and coward! So—you climb walls in the dark in pursuance of your villainous schemes! Answer me—do you come here by appointment, and are you devil enough to strive to make me believe that a pure and misguided girl would be weak enough to throw herself into your arms? Fill up the measure of your baseness, and declare as much.’

“ ‘No,’ he replied; ‘I alone am culpable. No one knew of my coming—no one suspected it. I could not rest.’

“ I interrupted him. ‘After to-night,’ I said gloomily, ‘you will rest quietly. Men such as you must be removed from the earth. You steal into my house, you thief and coward, with no regard for the fair fame of the woman you profess to love—reckless what infamy you cast upon her and of the life-long shame you would deliberately fling upon one who has been doubly betrayed. You have not the courage to suffer in silence, but you would proclaim to all the world that you are a martyr to love, the very name of which becomes degraded when placed in association with natures like yours. You belong to the class of miserable sentimentalists who bring ruin upon the unhappy women whom they entangle with their maudlin theories. Mischief enough have you accomplished—this night will put an end to your power to work further ill.’

“ ‘What do you intend to do with me?’ he asked.

“ ‘I intend to kill you,’ I replied; ‘not in cold blood—not as a murderer, but as an avenger. Stand up.’

“ He obeyed me. His fall had stunned him for a time; he was not otherwise injured.

“ ‘I will take no advantage of you,’ I said. ‘Here is wine to give you a false courage. Drink, and prepare yourself for what is to come. As surely as you have delivered yourself into my hands, so surely shall you die!’”

CHAPTER VI

THE HIDDEN CRIME

“**H** E drank the wine, not wisely or temperately as a cool-headed man whose life was at stake would have done, but hastily, feverishly, and with an air of desperation.

“‘You are a good fencer,’ I said, ‘the best among all the friends who visited me during the days of your treachery. You were proud of showing your skill, as you were of exhibiting every admirable quality with which you are gifted. Something of the mountebank in this.’

“‘At least,’ he said, rallying his courage, ‘do not insult me.’

“‘Why not? Have you not outraged what is most honourable and sacred? Here are rapiers ready to our hands.’

“‘A duel!’ he cried. ‘Here, and now?’

“‘Yes,’ I replied, ‘a duel, here and now. There is no fear of interruption. The sound of clashing steel will not fall upon other ears than ours.’

“‘It will not be a fair combat,’ he said. ‘You are no match for me with the rapier. Let me depart. Do not compel me to become your murderer.’

“‘You will nevermore set foot outside these walls,’ I said; ‘here you will find your grave.’

“‘It was my firm belief. I saw him already lying dead at my feet.

“‘If I should kill you,’ he said, ‘how shall I escape?’

“‘As best you may,’ I replied. ‘You are an adept at climbing walls. If you kill me, what happens to you thereafter is scarcely likely to interest me. But do not allow that thought to trouble you. What will take place to-night is ordained!’

“I began to move the furniture from the centre of the room, so as to afford a clear space for the duel. The tone in which he next spoke convinced me that I had impressed him. Indeed, my words were uttered with the certainty of

conviction, and a fear stole upon him that he had come to his death.

“ ‘I will not fight with you,’ he said; ‘the duel you propose is barbarous, and I decline to meet you unless witnesses are present.’

“ ‘So that we may openly involve the fair name of a lady in our quarrel,’ I retorted quietly. ‘No; that will not be. Before witnesses it is I who would decline to meet you. Are you a coward?’

“ ‘It matters little what you call me,’ he said, ‘as no other person is near. You cannot force me to fight you.’

“ ‘I think I can,’ I said, and I struck him in the face, and proceeded with my work.

“ My back was towards him; a loaded gun was hanging on the wall; unperceived by me he unslung it, and fired at me.

“ I did not know whether I was hit or not. Maddened by the cowardly act, I turned, and lifting him in the air, dashed him to the ground. His head struck against one of the legs of my writing-table; he groaned but once, and then lay perfectly still. It was the work of a moment, and the end had come. He lay dead before me.

“ I had no feeling of pity for him, and I was neither startled nor deeply moved. His punishment was a just punishment, and my honour was safe from the babble of idle and malicious tongues. All that devolved upon me now was to keep the events of this night from the knowledge of men.

“ There was, however, one danger. A gun had been fired. The sound might have aroused my wife or some of the servants, in which case an explanation would have to be given. At any moment they might appear. What lay on the floor must not be seen by other eyes than mine.

“ I dragged a cloth from a table and threw it over the body, and with as little noise as possible swiftly replaced the furniture in its original position. Then I sat on my chair and waited. For a few minutes I was in a state of great agitation, but after I had sat for an hour without being disturbed I knew that my secret was safe.

“ I removed the cloth from the face of the dead man and gazed at it. Strange to say, the features wore an ex-

pression of peacefulness. Death must have been instantaneous. Gradually, as I gazed upon the form of the man I had killed, the selfish contemplation in which I had been engaged during the last hour of suspense—a contemplation devoted solely to a consideration of the consequences of discovery, so far as I was concerned, and in which the fate of the dead man formed no part—became merged in the contemplation of the act itself apart from its earthly consequences.

“I had taken a human life. I, whose nature had been proverbially humane, was, in a direct sense of the word, a murderer. That the deed was done in a moment of passion was no excuse; a man is responsible for his acts. The blood I had shed shone in my eyes.

“What hopes, what yearnings, what ambitions, were here destroyed by me! For, setting aside the unhappy sentiment which had conducted events to this end, M. Gabriel was a man of genius, of whose career high expectations had been formed. I had not only destroyed a human being, I had destroyed art. Would it have been better had I allowed myself to be killed? Were death preferable to a life weighed down by a crime such as mine?

“For a short time these reflections had sway over me, but presently I steadily argued them down. I would not allow them to unman me. This coward and traitor had met a just doom.

“What remained for me now to do was to complete the concealment. The body must be hidden. After to-night—unless chance or the hand of Providence led to its discovery—the lifeless clay at my feet must never more be seen.

“There was a part of my grounds seldom, if ever, intruded upon by the servants—that portion in which, for the gratification of my wife, I had at the time of our marriage commenced improvements which had never been completed. There it was that my wife’s mother had met with the accident which resulted in her death. I thought of a pit deep enough for the concealment of the bodies of fifty men. Into this pit I would throw the body of M. Gabriel, and would cover it with earth and stones.

The task accomplished, there would be little fear of discovery.

“First satisfying myself that all was quiet and still in the villa, and that I was not being watched, I raised the body of M. Gabriel in my arms. As I did so, a horror and loathing of myself took possession of me; I shuddered in disgust; the work I was performing seemed to be the work of a butcher.

“However, what I resolved to do was done. In the dead of night, with darkness surrounding me, with the rain beating upon me, and the accusing wind shrieking in my ears, I consigned to its last resting-place the body of the man I had killed.

“Years have passed since that night. My name has not been dragged into the light for scandal-mongers to make sport of. Open shame and derision have been avoided—but at what a price! From the day following that upon which I forbade M. Gabriel my house, not a single word was exchanged between my wife and myself. She sent for me before she died, but she knew she would be dead before I arrived. A fearful gloom settled upon our lives, and will cover me to my last hour. This domestic estrangement, this mystery of silence between those whom he grew to love and honour, weighed heavily upon my son Christian. His child’s soul must have suffered much, and at times I have fancied I see in him the germs of a combination of sweetness and weakness which may lead to suffering. But suffer as he may, if honour be his guide I am content. I shall not live to see him as a man; my days are numbered.

“In the time to come—in the light of a purer existence—I may learn whether the deed I have done is or is not a crime.

“But one thing is clear to me. Had it not been for my folly, shame would not have threatened me, misery would not have attended me, and I should not have taken a human life. The misery and the shame did not affect me alone; they waited upon a young life and blighted its promise. It is I who am culpable, I who am responsible for what has occurred. It is impossible, without courting unhappiness, to divert the currents of being from their

natural channels: youth needs youth, is attracted to youth, seeks youth, as flowers seek the sun. Roses do not grow in ice.

“ Mine, then, the sin—a sin too late to expiate.

“ I would have my son marry when he is young, as in the course of nature he will love when he is young. It is the happier fate, because it is in accordance with natural laws.

“ If he into whose hands these pages may fall can discern a lesson applicable to himself in the events I have recorded, let him profit by them. If the circumstances of his life in any way resemble mine, I warn him to bear with wisdom and patience the penalty he has brought upon himself, and not to add, in the person of another being to whom he is bound and who is bound to him, to an unhappiness—most probably a secret unhappiness—of his own creating.

“ And I ask him to consider well whether any good purpose will be served by dragging into the open day the particulars of a crime, the publishing of which cannot injure the dead or benefit the living. It cannot afford him any consolation to think, if my son be alive, that needless suffering will be brought to the door of the innocent. Let him, then, be merciful and pitiful.”

CHAPTER VII

FALSE WIFE, FALSE FRIEND

THUS abruptly the record closed. To the last written page there were several added, as though the writer had more to say, and intended to say it. But the pages were blank. The intention, if intention there were, had never been carried out.

The reading of the record occupied the Advocate over an hour, and when he had finished, he sat gazing upon the manuscript. For a quarter of an hour he did not move. Then he rose—not quickly, as one would rise who was stirred by a sudden impulse, but slowly, with the air of a man who found a difficulty in arranging his

thoughts. With uneven steps he paced the study, to and fro, to and fro, pausing occasionally to handle in an aimless way a rare vase, which he turned about in his hands, and gazed at with vacant eyes. Occasionally, also, he paused before the manuscript and searched in its pages for words which his memory had not correctly retained. He did this with a consciousness which forced itself upon him, and which he vainly strove to ignore, that what he sought was applicable to himself.

It was not compassion, it was not tenderness, it was not horror, that moved him thus strangely, for he was a man who had been but rarely, if ever, moved as he was at the present time. It was the curious and disquieting associations between the dead man who had written and the living man who had read the record. And yet, although he could, if he had chosen, have reasoned this out, and have placed it mentally before him in parallel lines, his only distinct thought was to avoid the comparison. That he was unsuccessful in this did not tend to compose him.

Upon a bracket lay a bronze, the model of a woman's hand, from the life. A beautiful hand, slender but shapely. It reminded him of his wife.

He took it from the bracket and examined it, and after a little while thus passed, the words came involuntarily from his lips: "Perfect—but cold."

The spoken words annoyed him; they were the evidence of a lack of self-control. He replaced the bronze hastily, and when he passed it again would not look at it.

Suddenly he left the study, and went towards his wife's rooms. He had not proceeded more than half a dozen yards before his purpose, whatever it might have been, was relinquished as swiftly as it had been formed. He retraced his steps, and lingered irresolutely at the door of the study. With an impatient movement of his head—it was the action of a man who wrestled with thought as he would have done with a palpable being—he once more proceeded in the direction of his wife's apartments.

At the commencement of the passage which led to the study was a lobby, opening from the principal entrance. A noble staircase in the centre of the lobby led to the rooms occupied by Christian Almer and Pierre Lamont. On the

same floor as the study, beyond the staircase, were his wife's boudoir and private rooms.

This part of the house was but dimly lighted; one rose-lamp only was alight. On the landing above, where the staircase terminated, three lamps in a cluster were burning, and shed a soft and clear light around.

When he reached the lobby and was about to pass the staircase, the Advocate's progress was arrested by the sound of voices which fell upon his ears. These voices proceeded from the top of the staircase. He looked up, and saw, standing close together, his wife and Christian Almer. Instinctively he retreated into the deeper shadows, and stood there in silence with his eyes fixed upon the figures above him.

His wife's hand was resting on Almer's shoulder, and her fingers occasionally touched his hair. She was speaking almost in a whisper, and her face was bright and animated. Almer was replying to her in monosyllables, and even in the midst of the torture of this discovery, the Advocate observed that the face of his friend wore a troubled expression.

The Advocate remembered that his wife had wished him good-night before ten o'clock, and that when he made the observation that she was retiring early, she replied that she was so overpowered with fatigue that she could not keep her eyes open one minute longer. And here, nearly two hours after this statement, he found her conversing clandestinely with his friend in undisguised gaiety of spirits!

Never had he seen her look so happy. There was a tender expression in her eyes as she gazed upon Christian Almer which she had never bestowed upon him from the first days of their courtship.

A grave, dignified courtship, in which each was studiously kind and courteous to the other; a courtship without romance, in which there was no spring. A bitter smile rested upon his lips as this remembrance impressed itself significantly upon him.

He watched and waited, motionless as a statue. Midnight struck, and still the couple on the staircase lingered. Presently, however, and manifestly on Almer's urging,

Adelaide consented to leave him. Smilingly she offered him her hand, and held his for a longer time than friendship warranted. They parted; he ascending to his room, she descending to hers. When she was at the foot of the staircase she looked up and threw a kiss to Almer, and her face, with the light of the rose-lamp upon it, was inexpressibly beautiful. The next minute the Advocate was alone.

He listened for the shutting of their chamber-doors. So softly was this done both by his friend and his wife that it was difficult to catch the faint sound. He smiled again—a bitter smile of confirmation. It was in his legal mind a fatal item of evidence against them.

Slowly he returned to his study, and the first act of which he was conscious was that of standing on a certain spot and saying audibly as he looked down:

“It was here M. Gabriel fell!”

He knelt upon the carpet, and thought that on the boards beneath, even at this distance of time, stains of blood might be discerned, the blood of a treacherous friend. It was impossible for him to control the working of his mind; impossible to dwell upon the train of thought it was necessary he should follow out before he could decide upon a line of action. One o’clock, two o’clock struck, and he was still in this condition. All he could think of was the fate of M. Gabriel, and over and over again he muttered:

“It was here he fell—it was here he fell!”

There was a harmony in the storm which raged without. The peals of thunder, the lightning flashing through the windows, were in consonance with his mood. He knew that he was standing on the brink of a fatal precipice.

“Which would be best,” he asked mentally of himself, “that lightning should destroy three beings in this unhappy house, or that the routine of a nine-days’ wonder should be allowed to take its course? All that is wanting to complete the wreck would be some evidence to damn me in connection with Gautran and the unhappy girl he foully murdered.”

As if in answer to his thought, he heard a distinct tapping on one of his study windows. He hailed it with

eagerness; anything in the shape of action was welcome to him. He stepped to the window, and drawing up the blind saw darkly the form of a man without.

"Whom do you seek?" he asked.

"You," was the answer.

"Your mission must be an urgent one," said the Advocate, throwing up the window. "Is it murder or robbery?"

"Neither. Something of far greater importance."

"Concerning me?"

"Most vitally concerning you."

"Indeed. Then I should welcome you."

With strange recklessness he held out his hand to assist his visitor into the room. The man accepted the assistance, and climbing over the window-sill sprang into the study. He was bloody, and splashed from head to foot with mud.

"Have you a name?" inquired the Advocate.

"Naturally."

"Favour me with it."

"John Vanbrugh."

BOOK VII.—RETRIBUTION

CHAPTER I

JOHN VANBRUGH AND THE ADVOCATE

A STORMY night to seek you out," said John Vanbrugh, "and to renew an old friendship——"

"Stop there," interrupted the Advocate. "I admit no idea of a renewal of friendship between us."

"You reject my friendship?" asked Vanbrugh, wiping the blood and dirt from his face.

"Distinctly."

"So be it. Our interview shall be conducted without a thought of friendship, though some reference to the old days cannot be avoided. I make no apology for presenting myself in this condition. Man can no more rule the storm than he can the circumstances of his life. I have run some distance through the rain, and I have been attacked and almost killed. You perceive that I am exhausted, yet you do not offer me wine. You have it, I know, in that snug cupboard there. May I help myself? Thank you. Ah, there's a smack of youth in this liquor. It is life to one who has passed through such dangers as have encompassed me. You received my letter asking for an interview? I gave it myself into your hands on the last evening of the trial."

"I received it."

"Yet you were unwilling to accord me an interview."

"I had no desire to meet you again."

"It was ungrateful of you, for it is upon your own business—yours and no other man's—that I wished to speak with you. It was cold work out on the hill yonder, watching the lights in your study window, watching for

the simple waving of a handkerchief, which would mean infinitely more to you than to me, as you will presently confess. Dreary cold work, not likely to put a man like myself in an amiable mood. I am not on good terms with the world, as you may plainly perceive. I have had rough times since the days you deemed it no disgrace to shake hands with me. I have sunk very low by easy descents; you have risen to a giddy height. I wonder whether you have ever feared the fall. Men as great as you have met with such a misfortune. Things do not last for ever, Edward—pardon me, it was a slip of the tongue.”

“Do you come to beg?”

“No—for a reason. If I came on such an errand, I might spare myself the trouble.”

“Likely enough,” said the Advocate, who was too well acquainted with human nature not to be convinced, from Vanbrugh’s manner, that his was no idle visit.

“You were never renowned for your charities. And on the other hand I am poor, but I am not a beggar. I am frank enough to tell you I would prefer to steal. It is more independent, and not half so disgraceful. It may happen that the world would take an interest in a thief, but never in a beggar.”

“Is it to favour me with your philosophies that you pay me this visit?”

“I should be the veriest dolt. No, I will air my opinions when I am rich.”

“You intend, poor as you confess yourself, to become rich?”

“With your help, old friend.”

“Not with my help. You will receive none from me.”

“You are mistaken. Forgive me for the contradiction, but I speak on sure ground. Ah, how I have heard you spoken of! With what admiration and esteem! Almost with awe by some. Your talents, of themselves, could not have won this universal eulogy; it is your spotless character that has set the seal upon your fame. There is not a stain upon it; you have no weaknesses, no blemishes; you are absolutely pure. Other men have something to conceal—some family difficulty, some domestic disgrace, some slip in the path of virtue, which, were it known,

would turn the current against them. But against you there is not a breath; scandal has never soiled you. In this lies the strength of your position—in this lies its danger. Let shame, with cause, point its finger at you—old friend, the result is unpleasant to contemplate. For when a man such as you falls, he does not fall gradually. He topples over suddenly, and to-day he is as low in the gutter as yesterday he was high in the clouds.”

“You have said enough. I do not care to listen to you further. The tone you assume is offensive to me—such as I would brook from no man. You can go the way you came.”

And with a scornful gesture the Advocate pointed to the window.

“When I inform you which way I came,” said Vanbrugh, with easy insolence, “you will not be so ready to tell me to leave you before you learn the errand which brought me.”

“Which way, then, did you come?” asked the Advocate, in a tone of contempt.

“The way Gautran came—somewhat earlier than this, it is true, but not earlier than midnight.”

The Advocate grasped the back of a chair; it was a slight action, but sufficient to show that he was taken off his guard.

“You know that?” he said.

“Aye, I know that, and also that you feasted him, and gave him money.”

“Are you accomplices, you two knaves?”

“If so, I have at present the best of the bargain. But your surmise is not made with shrewdness. I never set eyes on Gautran until after he was pronounced innocent of the murder of Madeline. On that night I—shall we say providentially?—made his acquaintance.”

“You have met him since then?”

“Yes—this very night; our interview was one never to be forgotten. Come, I have been frank with you; I have used no disguises. I say to you honestly, the world has gone hard with me; I have known want and privation, and I am in a state of destitution. That is a condition of affairs sufficient not only to depress a man’s spirits, but to

make him disgusted with the world and mankind. I have, however, still some capacity for enjoyment left in me, and I would give the world another trial, not as a penniless rogue, but as a gentleman."

"Hard to accomplish," observed the Advocate, with a cynical smile.

"Not with a full purse. No music like the jingling of gold, and the world will dance to the tune. Well, I present myself to you, and ask you, who are rich and can spare what will be the making of me, to hand me from your full store as much as will convert a poor devil into a respectable member of society."

"I appreciate your confidence. I leave you to supply the answer."

"You will give me nothing?"

"Nothing."

"Mind—I do not ask it of your charity; I ask it of your prudence. It will be worth your while."

"That has to be proved."

"Good. We have made a commencement. Your reputation is worth much—in sober truth as much as it has brought you. But I am not greedy. It lies at my mercy, and I shall be content with a share."

"That is generous of you," said the Advocate, who by this time had regained his composure; "but I warn you—my patience is beginning to be exhausted."

"Only beginning? That is well. I advise you to keep a tight rein over it, and to ask yourself whether it is likely—considering the difference of our positions—that I should be here talking in this bold tone unless I held a power over you? I put it to you as a lawyer of eminence."

"There is reason in what you say."

"Let me see. What have I to sell? The security of your reputation? The power to prevent your name being uttered with horror? Your fame—your honour? Yes, I have quite that to dispose of, and as a man of business, which I never was until now, I recognise the importance of being precise. First—I have to sell my knowledge that, after midnight, you received Gautran in your study, that you treated him as a friend, and filled his pockets with gold. How much is that worth?"

"Nothing. My word against his, against yours, against a hundred such as you and he."

"You would deny it?"

"Assuredly—to protect myself." As he made this answer, it seemed to the Advocate as if the principle of honour by which his actions had been guided until within the last few days were slipping from him, and as if the vilest wretch that breathed had a right to call him his equal.

"We will pass that by," said Vanbrugh, helping himself to wine. "Really, your wine is exquisite. In some respects you are a man to be envied. It is worth much to a man not only to possess the best of everything the world can give, but to know that he has the means and the power to purchase it. With that consciousness within him, he walks with his head in the air. You used to be fond of discussing these niceties; I had no taste for them. I left the deeper subtleties of life to those of thinner blood than mine. Pleasure was more in my way—and will be again."

"You are wandering from the point," said the Advocate.

"There is a meaning in everything I say; I will clip my wings. Your word against a hundred men such as I and Gautran? I am afraid you are right. We are vagabonds—you are a gentleman. So, then, my knowledge of the fact that you treated Gautran as a friend after you had procured his acquittal is worth nothing. Admitted. But put that knowledge and that fact in connection with another and a sterner knowledge and fact—that you knew Gautran to be guilty of the murder. How then? Does it begin to assume a value? Your silence gives me hopes that my visit will not be fruitless. Between men who once were equals and friends, and who, after a lapse of years, come together as we have come together now, candour is a useful attribute. Let us exercise it. I am not here on your account, nor do I hold you in such regard that I would trouble myself to move a finger to save your reputation. The master I am working for is Self; the end I am working for is an easy life, a life of pleasure. This accomplished by your aid, I have nothing more to do with

you or your affairs. The business is an unpleasant one, and I shall be glad to forget it. Refuse what I ask, and you will sink lower than I have ever sunk. There are actions which the world will forgive in the ignorant, but not in men of ripe intellect."

He paused and gazed negligently at the Advocate, who during the latter part of Vanbrugh's speech, was considering the dangers of his position. The secret of Gautran's guilt belonged not alone to himself and Gautran; this man Vanbrugh had been admitted into it, and he was an enemy more to be dreaded than Gautran. He saw his peril, and that he unconsciously acknowledged it to be imminent was proved by the thought which intruded itself—against his will, as it seemed—whether it would be wise to buy Vanbrugh off, to purchase his silence.

"It is easy," he said, "to invent tales. You and a dozen men, in conjunction with the monster Gautran——"

"As you say," interrupted Vanbrugh, gently nodding his head, "the monster Gautran. But why should you call him so unless you knew him to be guilty? Were you assured of his innocence, you would speak of him pityingly, as one undeservedly oppressed and persecuted. 'The monster Gautran!' Thank you. It is an admission."

"——May invent," continued the Advocate, not heeding the interruption, but impressed by its logic, "may invent any horrible tale you please of any man you please. The difficulty will be to get the world to believe it."

"Exactly. But in this case there is no difficulty, although the murderer be dead."

"Gautran! Dead!" exclaimed the Advocate, surprised out of himself. Gautran was dead! Encompassed as he was by danger and treachery, the news was a relief to him.

"Yes, dead," replied Vanbrugh, purposely assuming a careless tone. "Did I not tell you before? Singular that it should have escaped me. But I have so much to say, and in my brightest hours I was always losing the sequence of things."

"And you," said the Advocate, "meeting this man by chance——"

"Pardon me. I asked you whether I should consider our meeting providential."

"It matters not. You, meeting this man, come to me after his death, for the purpose of extracting money from me. You will fail."

"I shall succeed."

"You killed Gautran, and want money to escape."

"No. He was killed by a higher agency, and I want no money to escape. You will hear to-morrow how he met his death, for all the towns and villages will be ringing with it. I continue. Say that Gautran at the point of death made a dying confession, on oath, not only of his guilt, but of your knowledge of it when you defended him—say that this confession exists in writing, duly signed. Would that paper, in conjunction with what I have already offered for sale, be worth your purchase? Take time to consider. You are dealing with a man in desperate circumstances, one who, if you drive him to it, will pull you down, high as you are. You will help me, old friend."

"It may be. Have you possession of the paper you speak of?"

"I have. Would you like to hear it?"

"Yes."

Vanbrugh moved, so that a table was between him and the Advocate, and taking Gautran's confession from his pocket read in a clear voice:

"I, Gautran the woodman, lately tried for the murder of Madeline the flower-girl, being now at the point of death, and conscious that I have only a few minutes to live, and being also in the full possession of my reason, hereby make oath and swear:

"That being thrown into prison, awaiting my trial, I believed there was no escape from the doom I justly merited, for the reason that I was guilty of the murder.

"That some days before my trial was to take place, the Advocate who defended me voluntarily undertook to prove to my judges that I was innocent of the crime I committed.

"That with this full knowledge, he conducted my case

with such ability that I was set free and pronounced innocent.

"That on the night of my acquittal, after midnight had struck, and when every person but himself in the House of White Shadows was asleep, I secretly visited him in his study, and remained with him for some time.

"That he gave me food and money, and bade me go my way.

"That I am ignorant of the motives which induced him, to whom I was a perfect stranger, to deliberately defeat the ends of justice.

"That the proof that he knew me to be guilty lies in the fact that I made a full confession to him.

"To which I solemnly swear, being about to appear before a just God to answer for my crime. I pray for forgiveness and mercy.

"Signed,

GAUTRAN."

Without comment, John Vanbrugh folded the paper, and replaced it carefully in his pocket.

"The confession may be forged," said the Advocate.

"Gautran's signature," said Vanbrugh, "will refute such a charge. He could write only his name, and documents can certainly be found bearing his signature, which can be compared with this."

"With that document in your possession," said the Advocate, speaking very slowly, "are you not afraid to be here with me—alone—knowing, if it state the truth, how much I have at stake?"

"Excellent!" exclaimed Vanbrugh. "What likenesses there are in human nature, and how thin the line that divides the base from the noble! Afraid? No—for if you lay a hand upon me, for whom you are no more than a match, I will rouse the house and denounce you. Restrain yourself and hear me out. I have that to say which will prove to you the necessity, if you have the slightest regard for your honour, of dealing handsomely with me. It relates to the girl whose murderer you set free—to Madeline the flower-girl and to yourself."

CHAPTER II

A TERRIBLE REVELATION

WITHOUT requesting permission, John Vanbrugh filled his glass with wine, which he drank leisurely with his eyes fixed on the Advocate's pale face the while. When he spoke, it did not escape the Advocate that he seemed to fling aside the flippancy of manner which had hitherto characterised him, and that his voice was unusually earnest.

"I do not ask you to excuse me," he said, "for recalling the memory of a time when you did not despise my companionship. It is necessary for my purpose. We were, indeed, more than companions—we were friends. What it was that made you consort with me is just now a mystery to me. The contrast in our characters may have tempted you. I, a careless, light-hearted fellow who loved to enjoy the hours; you, a serious, cold-hearted student, dreaming perhaps of the position you have attained. It may be that you deliberately made a study of me to see what use you could make of my weakness. However it was, I lived in the present, you in the future. The case is now reversed, and it is I who live in the future.

"I have said you were cold-hearted, and I do not suppose you will trouble yourself to deny it. Such as you are formed to rise, while we impulsive, reckless devils are pretty sure to tumble in the mud. But I never had such a fall as you are threatened with, and scapegrace, vagabond as I am, I am thankful not to have on my conscience what you have on yours.

"Now for certain facts.

"I contemplated—no, I mistake, I never contemplated—I settled to go on a tour for a few weeks, and scramble through bits of France, Switzerland, and Italy. You will remember my mentioning it to you. Yes, I see in your face that you are following me, and I shall feel obliged by your correcting me if in my statement of facts I should

happen to trip. The story I am telling needs no effort of the imagination to embellish it. It is in its bare aspect sufficiently ghastly and cruel.

“When I was about to start on my tour, you, of your own accord, offered to accompany me. You had been studying too hard, and a wise doctor recommended you to rest a while, if you did not care to have brain-fever, and also recommended you to seek new scenes in the company of a cheerful friend whose light spirits would be a good medicine for an overworked brain. You took the doctor’s advice, and you did me the honour to choose me for a companion. So we started on our little tour of pleasure.

“To shorten what I have to say I will not dwell upon the details of our jaunt, but I fix myself, with you, at Zermatt, where we stayed for three weeks. The attraction—what was it? The green valleys—the grandeur of the scenery? No. A woman. More correctly speaking, two women. Young, lovely, inexperienced, innocent. Daughters of a peasant, whose cottage door was always open to us, and who was by no means unwilling to receive small presents of money from liberal gentlemen like ourselves. Again I slip details—the story becomes trite. We captivated the hearts of the simple peasant maidens, and amused ourselves with them. In me that was natural; it was my way. But in you this circumstance was something to be astonished at. For just as long as you remained at Zermatt you were a transformed being. I don’t think, until that time, I had ever heard you laugh heartily. Well, suddenly you disappeared; getting up one morning, I found that my friend had deserted me.

“It was shabby behaviour, at the best. However, it did not seriously trouble me; every man is his own master, and I think we were beginning to tire a little of each other. It was awkward, though, to be asked by one of our pretty peasant friends where my handsome friend had gone, and when he would return, and not be able to give a sensible answer.

“This girl, who had been in your presence always bright and joyous and happy, grew sad and quiet and anxious-looking in your absence, and appeared to have a

secret on her mind that was making her wretched. I stayed on at Zermatt for another month, and then I bade good-bye to my sweetheart, promising to come again in a year. I kept my promise, but when I asked for her in Zermatt I heard that she was dead, and that her sister and father had left the village, and had gone no one knew whither.

"It will be as well for me here to remind you that during our stay in Zermatt we gave no home address, and that no one knew where we came from or where we lived. So prudent were we that we acted as if we were ashamed of our names.

"Three years afterwards in another part of Switzerland I met the woman to whom you had made love; she had lost her father, but was not without a companion. She had a little daughter—your child!"

"A lie!" said the Advocate, with difficulty controlling himself; "a monstrous fabrication!"

"A solemn truth," replied Vanbrugh, "verified by the mother's oath, and the certificate of birth. To dispute it will be a waste of breath and time. Hear me to the end. The mother had but one anxiety—to forget you and your treachery, and to be able to live so that her shame should be concealed. To accomplish this it was necessary that she should live among strangers, and it was for this reason she had left her native village. She asked me about you, and I—well, I played your game. I told her you had gone to a distant part of the world, and that I knew nothing of you. We were still friends, you and I, although our friendship was cooling. When I next saw you I had it in my mind to relate the circumstance to you; but you will remember that just at that time you took it into your head to put an end to our intimacy. We had a few words, I think, and you were pleased to tell me that you disapproved of my habits of life, and that you intended we should henceforth be strangers. I was not in an amiable mood when I left you, and I resolved, on the first opportunity, to seek the woman you had brought to shame, and advise her to take such steps against you as would bring disgrace to your door. It would be paying you in your own coin, I thought. However, good fortune stood

your friend at that time. My own difficulties or pleasures, or both combined, claimed my attention, and occupied me for many months, and when next I went to the village in which I had last seen your peasant sweetheart and your child, they were not to be found. I made inquiries, but could learn nothing of them, so I gave it up as a bad job, and forgot all about the matter. Since then very many years have passed, and I sank and sank, and you rose and rose. We did not meet again; but I confess, when I used to read accounts of your triumphs and your rising fame, that I would not have neglected an opportunity to have done you an ill turn had it been in my power. I was at the lowest ebb, everything was against me, and I was wondering how I should manage to extricate myself from the desperate position into which bad luck had driven me, when, not many weeks since, I met in the streets of Geneva two women. They were hawking nosegays, and the moment I set eyes upon the elder of these women I recognised in her your old sweetheart from Zermatt. You appear to be faint. Shall I pause a while before I continue?"

"No," said the Advocate, and he drank with feverish eagerness two glasses of wine; "go on to the end."

"It was your sweetheart from Zermatt, and no other. And the younger of these women, one of the loveliest creatures I ever beheld, was known as Madeline the flower-girl."

The Advocate, with a sudden movement, turned his chair, so that his face was hidden from Vanbrugh.

"They were poor—and I was poor. If what I suspected, when I gazed at Madeline, was correct, I saw not only an opportunity for revenge upon you, but a certainty of being able to obtain money from you. The secret to such a man as you, married to a young and beautiful woman, was worth a fair sum, which I resolved should be divided between Pauline—that was the name adopted by the mother of your child—and myself. You cannot accuse me of a want of frankness. I discovered where they lived—I had secret speech with Pauline. My suspicion was no longer a suspicion—it was a fact. Madeline the flower-girl was your daughter."

He paused, but the Advocate made no movement, and did not speak.

"How," continued Vanbrugh, "to turn that fact to advantage? How, and in what way, to make it worth a sum sufficiently large to satisfy me? That was what now occupied my thoughts. Madeline and her mother were even poorer than I supposed, and from Pauline's lips did I hear how anxious she was to remove her daughter from the temptations by which she was surrounded. In dealing with you, I knew it was necessary to be well prepared. You are a powerful antagonist to cope with, and one must have sure cards in his hand to have even a chance of winning any game he is playing with such a man as yourself. Pauline and I spoke frequently together, and gradually I unfolded to her the plan I had resolved upon. Without disclosing your name I told her sufficiently to convince her that, by my aid, she might obtain a sum of money from the man who had wronged her which would enable her to place herself and her daughter in a safer position—a position in which a girl as beautiful as Madeline would almost certainly meet with a lover of good social position whom she would marry and with whom she would lead a happy life. Thus would she escape the snare into which she herself fell when she met you. This was the mother's dream. Satisfied that I could guide her to this end, Pauline signed an agreement, which is in my possession, by which she bound herself to pay me half the money she obtained from you in compensation for your wrong. Only one thing was to remain untouched by her and me—a sum which I resolved to obtain from you as a marriage portion for your daughter. Probably, under other circumstances, you would not have given me credit for so much consideration, but viewed in the light of the position in which you are placed, you may believe me. If you doubt it, I can show you the clause in black and white. This being settled between Pauline and me, I told her who you were—how rich you were, how famous you had grown, and how that you had lately married a young and beautiful woman. The affairs of a man as eminent as yourself are public property, and the newspapers delight in recording every particular, be it ever so trivial, con-

nected with the lives of men of your rank. It was then necessary to ascertain what proof we held that you were the father of Madeline. Our visit to Zermatt could be proved—her oath and mine, in connection with dates, would suffice. Then there would, in all likelihood, be living in Zermatt men and women whose testimony would be valuable. The great point was the birth of the child and the date, and to my discomfiture I learnt that Pauline had lost the certificate of her daughter's birth. But the record existed elsewhere, and it was to obtain a copy of this record, and to collect other evidence, that Pauline left her daughter. Her mission was a secret one, necessarily, and thus no person, not even Madeline, had any knowledge of its purport. What, now, remains to be told? Nothing that you do not know—except that when Pauline left her daughter for a few weeks, it was arranged that she and I should meet in Geneva on a certain date, to commence our plan of operations, and that I, having business elsewhere, was a couple of hundred miles away when Gautran murdered your hapless child. I arrived in Geneva on the last day of Gautran's trial; and on that evening, as you came out of the court-house, I placed in your hands the letter asking you to give me an interview. I will say nothing of my feelings when I heard that you had successfully defended, and had set free, the murderer of your child. What I had to look after was myself and my own interest. And now you, who at the beginning of this interview rejected a renewal of the old friendship which existed between us, may probably inwardly acknowledge that had you accepted the hand I offered you, it is not I who would have been the gainer."

Again he paused, and again, neither by word or movement, did the Advocate break the silence.

"It will be as well," presently said Vanbrugh, "to recapitulate what I have to sell. First, the fact that you, a man of spotless character—so believed—deliberately betrayed a simple innocent girl, and then deserted her. Inconceivable, the world would say, in such a man, unless the proofs were incontestable. The proofs are incontestable. Next, the birth of your child, and your brutal—pardon me, there is no other word to express it, and it is

one which would be freely used—negligence to ascertain whether your conduct had brought open shame and ruin upon the girl you betrayed. Next, the knowledge of the life of poverty and suffering led by the mother and the child, while you were in the possession of great wealth. Next, the murder of your child by a man whose name is uttered with execration. Next, your voluntary espousal of his cause, and your successful defence of a monster whom all men knew to be guilty of the foul crime. Next, your knowledge, at the time you defended him, that he was guilty of the murder of your own child. Next, in corroboration of this knowledge, the dying declaration of Gautran, solemnly sworn to and signed by him. A strong hand. No stronger has ever been held by any man's enemy, and until you come to my terms, I am your enemy. If you refuse to purchase of me what I have to sell—the documents in my possession, and my sacred silence to the last day of my life upon the matters which affect you—and for such a sum as will make my future an easy one, I give you my word I will use my power against you, and will drag you down from the height upon which you stand. I cannot speak in more distinct terms. You can rescue me from poverty, I can rescue you from ignominy."

The Advocate turned his face to Vanbrugh, who saw that, in the few minutes during which it had been hidden from his sight, it had assumed a hue of deadly whiteness. All the sternness had departed from it, and the cold, piercing eyes wavered as they looked first at Vanbrugh, then at the objects in the study. It was as though the Advocate were gazing, for the first time, upon the familiar things by which he was surrounded. Strange to say, this change in him seemed to make him more human—seemed to declare, "Stern and cold-hearted as I have appeared to the world, I am susceptible to tenderness." The mask had fallen from his face, and he stood now revealed—a man with human passions and human weaknesses, to whom a fatal sin in his younger days had brought a retribution as awful as it was ever the lot of a human being to suffer. There was something pitiable in this new presentment of a strong, earnest, self-confident nature, and even Vanbrugh was touched by it.

During the last half-hour the full force of the storm had burst over the House of White Shadows. The rain poured down with terrific power, and the thunder shook the building to its foundations. The Advocate listened with a singular and curious intentness to the terrible sounds, and when Vanbrugh remarked, "A fearful night," he smiled in reply. But it was the smile of a man whose heart was tortured to the extreme limits of human endurance.

Once again he filled a glass with wine, and raised it to his mouth, but as the liquor touched his lips, he shuddered, and holding the glass upright in his hand, he turned it slowly over and poured it on the ground; then, with much gentleness, he replaced the glass upon the table.

"What has become of the woman you speak of as Pauline?" he asked. His very voice was changed. It was such as would proceed from one who had been prostrated by long and almost mortal sickness.

"I do not know," replied Vanbrugh. "I have neither seen nor heard from her since the day before she left her daughter."

"Say that I was disposed," said the Advocate, speaking very slowly, and pausing occasionally, as though he was apprehensive that he would lose control of speech, "to purchase your silence, do you think I should be safe in the event of her appearing on the scene? Would not her despair urge her to seek revenge upon the man who betrayed and deserted her, and who set her daughter's murderer free?"

"It might be so—but at all events she would be ignorant of your knowledge of Gautran's guilt. This danger at least would be averted. The secret is ours at present, and ours only."

"True. You believe that I knew Gautran to be guilty when I defended him?"

"I am forced to believe it. Explain, otherwise, why you permitted him to visit you secretly in the dead of night, and why you filled his pockets with gold."

"It cannot be explained. Yet what motive could I have had in setting him free?"

"It is not for me to say. What I know, I know. I pretend to nothing further."

"Do you suppose I care for money?" As the Advocate asked the question, he opened a drawer in the *escritoire*, and produced a roll of notes. "Take them; they are yours. But I do not purchase your silence with them. I give the money to you as a gift."

"And I thank you for it. But I must have more."

"Wait—wait. This story of yours has yet to be concluded."

"Is it my fancy," said Vanbrugh, "or is it a real sound I hear? The ringing of a bell—and now, a beating at the gates without, and a man's voice calling loudly?"

Without hesitation, the Advocate went from his study into the grounds. The fury of the storm made it difficult for him to keep his feet, but he succeeded in reaching the gate and opening it. A hand grasped his, and a man clung to him for support. The Advocate could not see the face of his visitor, nor, although he heard a voice speaking to him, did the words of the answer fall upon his ears. Staggering blindly through the grounds, they arrived at the door of the villa, and stumbled into the passage. There, by the aid of the rose lamp which hung in the hall, he distinguished the features of his visitor. It was Father Capel.

"Have you come to see me?" asked the Advocate, "or are you seeking shelter from the storm?"

"I have come to see you," replied Father Capel. "I hardly hoped to find you up, but perceived lights in your study windows, and they gave me confidence to make the attempt to speak with you. I have been beating at the gates for fully half an hour."

He spoke in his usual gentle tones, and gazed at the Advocate's white face with a look of kindly and pitying penetration.

"You are wet to the skin," said the Advocate. "I must find a change of clothing for you."

"No, my son," said the priest; "I need none. It is not the storm without I dread—it is the storm within." As though desirous this remark should sink into the Advocate's heart, he paused a few moments before he spoke

again. "I fear this storm of Nature will do much harm. Trees are being uprooted and buildings thrown down. There is danger of a flood which may devastate the village, and bring misery to the poor. But there is a gracious God above us"—he looked up reverently—"and if a man's conscience is clear, all is well."

"There is a significance in the words you utter," said the Advocate, conducting the priest to his study, "which impresses me. Your mission is an important one."

"Most important; it concerns the soul, not the body."

"A friend of mine," said the Advocate, pointing to Vanbrugh, who was standing when they entered, "who has visited me to-night for the first time for many years, on a mission as grave as yours. It was he who heard your voice at the gates."

Father Capel inclined his head to Vanbrugh, who returned the courtesy.

"I wish to confer with you privately," said the priest. "It will be best that we should be alone."

"Nay," said the Advocate, "you may speak freely in his presence. I have but one secret from him and all men. I beg you to proceed."

CHAPTER III

PAULINE

I HAVE no choice but to obey you," said Father Capel, "for time presses, and a life is hanging in the balance. I should have been here before had it not been that my duty called me most awfully and suddenly to a man who has been smitten to death by the hand of God. The man you defended—Gautran, charged with the murder of an innocent girl—is dead. Of him I may not speak at present. Death-bed confessions are sacred, and apart from that, not even in the presence of your dearest friend can I say one further word concerning the sinner whose soul is now before its Creator. I came to you from a dying woman, who is known by the name of Pauline."

Both Vanbrugh and the Advocate started at the mention of the name.

"Fate is merciful," said the Advocate in a low tone; "its blows are sharp and swift."

"Before I left her I promised to bring you to her to-morrow," continued the priest, "but Providence, which directed me to Gautran in his dying moments, impels me to break that promise. She may die before to-morrow, and she has that to say which vitally concerns you, and which you must hear, if she has strength enough to speak. I ask you to come with me to her without a moment's delay, through this storm, which has been sent as a visitation for human crime."

"I am ready to accompany you," said the Advocate.

"And I," said Vanbrugh.

"No," said the priest, "only he and I. Who you are I do not seek to know, but you cannot accompany us."

"Remain here," said the Advocate to Vanbrugh; "when I return I will hide nothing from you. Now, Father Capel."

It was not possible for them to engage in conversation. The roaring of the wind prevented a word from being heard. For mutual safety they clasped hands and proceeded on their way. They encountered many dangers, but escaped them. Torrents of water poured down from the ranges—great branches snapped from the trees and fell across their path—the valleys were in places knee-deep in water—and occasionally they fancied they heard cries of human distress in the distance. If the priest had not been perfectly familiar with the locality, they would not have arrived at their destination, but he guided his companion through the storm, and they stood at length before the cottage in which Pauline lay.

Father Capel lifted the latch, and pulled the Advocate after him into the room.

There were but two apartments in the cottage. Pauline lay in the room at the back. In a corner of the room in which they found themselves a man lay asleep; his wife was sitting in a chair, watching and waiting. She rose wearily as the priest and the Advocate entered.

"I am glad you have come, father," she said, "she has

been very restless, and once she gave a shriek, like a death-shriek, which curdled my blood. She woke and frightened my child."

She pointed to a baby-girl, scarcely eighteen months old, who was lying by her father with her eyes wide open. The child, startled by the entrance of strangers, ran to her mother, who took her on her lap, saying petulantly, "There, there—be quiet. The gentlemen won't hurt you."

"Is Pauline awake now?" asked Father Capel.

The woman went to the inner room and returned. "She is sleeping," she said, "and is very quiet."

Father Capel beckoned to the Advocate, who followed him to the bedside of the dying woman. She lay so still that the priest lowered his head to hers to ascertain whether she was breathing.

"Life appears to be ebbing away," he whispered to the Advocate; "she may die in her sleep."

Quiet as she was, there was no peace in her face; an expression of exquisite suffering rested on it. The sign of suffering, denoting how sorely her heart had been wrung, caused the Advocate's lips to quiver.

"It is I who have brought her to this," he thought. "But for me she would not be lying in a dying state before me."

He was tortured not only by remorse, but by a terror of himself.

Notwithstanding that so many years had passed since he last gazed upon her, she was not so much changed that he did not recognise in her the blooming peasant girl of Zermatt. Since then he had won honour and renown and the admiration and esteem of men; the best that life could offer was his, or had been his until the fatal day upon which he resolved to undertake the defence of Gautran. And now—how stood the account? He was the accomplice of the murderer of his own child—the mother of his child was dying in suffering—his wife was false to him—his one friend had betrayed him. The monument of greatness he had raised had crumbled away, and in a very little while the world would know him for what he was. His bitterest enemy could not have held him in deeper despal than he held himself.

"You recognise her?" said the priest.

"Yes."

"And her child, Madeline, was yours?"

"I am fain to believe it," said the Advocate; "but the proof is not too clear."

"The proof is there," said the priest, pointing to Pauline; "she has sworn it. Do you think—knowing that death's door is open for her to enter—knowing that her child, the only being she loved on earth, is waiting for her in the eternal land—that she would, by swearing falsely, and with no end in view that could possibly benefit herself, imperil the salvation of her soul? It is opposed to human reason."

"It is. I am forced to believe what I would give my life to know was false."

"Unhappy man! Unhappy man!" said the priest, sinking on his knees. "I will pray for you, and for the woman whose life you blighted."

The Advocate did not join the priest in prayer. His stern sense of justice restrained him. The punishment he had brought upon himself he would bear as best he might, and he would not inflict upon himself the shameful humiliation of striving to believe that, by prayers and tears, he could suddenly atone for a crime as terrible as that of which he was guilty.

"Father Capel," he said, when the priest rose from his knees, "from what you have said, I gather that the man Gautran made confession to you before he died. I do not seek to know what that confession was, but with absolute certainty I can divine its nature. The man you saw in my study brought to me Gautran's dying declaration, signed by Gautran himself, which charges me with a crime so horrible that, were I guilty of it, laden as I am with the consequences of a sin which I do not repudiate, I should deserve the worst punishment. Are you aware of the existence of this document?"

"I hear of its existence now for the first time," replied the priest. "When I left the bedside of this unhappy woman, and while I was wending my way home through the storm, I heard cries and screams for help on a hill near the House of White Shadows, as though two men

were engaged in a deadly struggle. I proceeded in the direction of the conflict, and discovered only Gautran, who had been crushed to the earth by the falling of a tree which had been split by the storm. He admitted that he and another man were fighting, and that the design was murder. I made search, both then and afterwards, for the other man, but did not succeed in finding him. I left Gautran for the purpose of obtaining assistance to extricate him, for the tree had fallen across his body, and he could not move. When I returned he was dead, and some gold which he had asked me to take from his pocket was gone; an indication that, during my absence, human hands had been busy about him. If Gautran's dying declaration be authentic, it must have been obtained while I was away to seek for assistance."

"I can piece the circumstances," said the Advocate. "The man you saw in my study was the man who was engaged in the struggle with Gautran. It was he who obtained the confession, and he who stole the gold. In that confession I am charged with undertaking the defence of Gautran with the knowledge that he was guilty. It is not true. When I defended him I believed him to be innocent; and if he made a similar declaration to you, he has gone to his account with a black lie upon his soul. That will not clear me, I know, and I do not mention it to you for the purpose of exciting your pity for me. It is simply because it is just that you should hear my denial of the charge; and it is also just that you should hear something more. Up to the hour of Gautran's acquittal I believed him, degraded and vile as he was, to be innocent of the murder; but that night, as I was walking to the House of White Shadows, I met Gautran, who, in the darkness, supposing me to be a stranger, would have robbed me, and probably taken my life. I made myself known to him, and he, overcome with terror at the imaginary shadow of his victim which his remorse and ignorance had conjured up, voluntarily confessed to me that he was guilty. My error—call it by what strange name you will—dated from that moment. Knowing that the public voice was against me, I had not the honesty to take the right course. But if I," he added, with a gloomy recollection of his wife and

friend, "had not by my own act rendered valueless the fruits of a life of earnest endeavour, it would have been done for me by those in whom I placed a sacred trust."

For several hours Father Capel and the Advocate remained by the bedside of Pauline, who lay unconscious, as if indeed, as the priest had said, life was ebbing away in her sleep. The storm continued and increased in intensity, and had it not been that the little hut which sheltered them was protected by the position in which it stood, it would have been swept away by the wind. From time to time the peasant gave them particulars of the devastation created by the floods, which were rushing in torrents from every hill, but their duty chained them to the bedside of Pauline. An hour before noon she opened her eyes, and they rested upon the face of the Advocate.

"You have come," she sighed.

He knelt by the bed, and addressed her, but it was with difficulty he caught the words she spoke. Death was very near.

"Was Madeline my daughter?" he asked.

"Yes," answered Pauline, "as I am about to appear before my God!"

The effort exhausted her, and she lay still for many minutes. Then her hand feebly sought her pillow, and the Advocate, perceiving that she wished to obtain something from under it, searched and found a small packet. He knew immediately, when she motioned that she desired him to retain it, that it contained the certificate of his daughter's birth. The priest prayed audibly for the departing soul. Pauline's lips moved; the Advocate placed his ear close. She breathed the words:

"We shall meet again soon! Pray for forgiveness!"

Then death claimed her, and her earthly sorrows were ended.

CHAPTER IV

ONWARD—TO DEATH

LATE in the afternoon the Advocate was stumbling, almost blindly, through the tempest towards the House of White Shadows. Father Capel had striven in vain to dissuade him from making the attempt to reach the villa.

“There is safety only in the sheltered heights,” said the priest. “By this time the valleys are submerged, and the dwellings therein are being swept away. Ah me—ah me! how many of my poor are ruined; how many dead! Not in my experience have I seen a storm as terrible as this. It is sent as a warning and a punishment. Only the strongest houses in the villages that lie in the valleys will be able to withstand its fury. Be persuaded, and remain here until its force is spent.”

He spoke to one who was deaf to reason. It seemed to the Advocate as though the end of his life had come, as though his hold upon the world might at any moment be sapped; but while he yet lived there was before him a task which it was incumbent upon him to perform. It was imperative that he should have speech with his wife and Christian Almer.

“I have work to do,” he said to the priest, “and it must be done to-day.”

An unaccustomed note in his voice caused Father Capel to regard him with even a more serious attention than he had hitherto bestowed upon him.

“There are men,” said the priest, “who, when sudden misfortune overtakes them, adopt a desperate expedient to put an end to all worldly trouble, and thus add sin to sin.”

“Have no fear for me,” said the Advocate. “I am not contemplating suicide. What fate has in store for me I will meet without repining. You caution me against the storm, yet I perceive you yourself are preparing to face it.”

"I go to my duty," said the priest.

"And I to mine," rejoined the Advocate.

Thus they parted, each going his separate way.

The Advocate had not calculated the difficulties he was to encounter; his progress was slow, and he had to make wide detours on the road, and frequently to retrace his steps for a considerable distance, in order to escape being swept to death by the floods. From the ranges all around the village in which the House of White Shadows was situated the water was pouring in torrents, which swirled furiously through the lower heights, carrying almost certain destruction to those who had not already availed themselves of the chances of escape. Terrific as was the tempest, he took no heed of it. It was not the storm of Nature, but the storm within his soul which absorbed him. He met villagers on the road flying for safety. With terror-struck movements they hurried past, men, women, and children, uttering cries of alarm at the visitation. Now and then one and another called upon him to turn back.

"If you proceed," they said, "you will be engulfed in the rapids. Turn back if you wish to live."

He did not answer them, but doggedly pursued his way.

"My punishment has come," he thought. "I have no wish to live, nor do I desire to outlast this day."

Once only, of his own prompting, did he pause. A woman, with little children clinging to her, passed him, sobbing bitterly. His eyes happening to light upon her face, he saw in it some likeness to the peasant girl whom in years gone by he had betrayed. The likeness might or might not have been there, but it existed certainly in his fancy. He stopped and questioned her, and learned that she had been utterly ruined by the storm, her cottage destroyed, her small savings lost, and all her hopes blasted. He emptied his pockets of money, and gave her what valuables he had about him.

"Sell them," he said; "they will help to purchase you a new home."

She called down blessings on his head.

"If she knew me for what I am," he muttered as he left her, "she would curse me."

On and on he struggled and seemed to make no progress. The afternoon was waning, and the clouds were growing blacker and thicker, when he saw a man staggering towards him. He was about to put a question to him respecting the locality of the House of White Shadows—his course had been so devious that he scarcely knew in what direction it lay—when a closer approach to the man showed him to be no other than John Vanbrugh.

“Ah!” cried Vanbrugh, seizing the Advocate’s arm, and thus arresting his steps, “I feared we had lost you. A fine time I have had of it down in your villa yonder! Had it not been for the storm, I should have been bundled before a magistrate on a charge of interloping; but everybody had enough to do to look after himself. It was a case of the devil take the hindmost. A scurvy trick, though, of yours, to desert a comrade; still, for my sake, I am glad to see you in the land of the living.”

“Have you come straight from the villa?” asked the Advocate.

“Straight!” cried Vanbrugh with a derisive laugh. “I defy the soberest saint to walk straight for fifty yards in such a hurricane. Three bottles of wine would not make me so unsteady as this cursed wind—enough to stop one’s breath for good or ill. What! you are not going on?”

“I am. What should hinder me?”

“Some small love of life—a trivial but human sentiment. There is no one in your house. It is by this time deserted by all but the rats.”

“My wife——”

“Was the last to leave, with a friend of yours, Christian Almer by name. He and I had some words together. Let me tell you. I happened to drop a remark concerning you which he considered disparaging, and had I been guilty of all the cardinal sins he could not have been more angered. A true friend—but probably he does not know what I know. Well for you that I did not enlighten him. You will meet them a little lower down on the road, but I advise you not to go too far. The valleys are rivers, carrying everything, headlong, in their course.”

"There was an old lawyer in the house. Do you know what has become of him?"

"I saw him perched on the back of a fool, and by their side a girl with the sweetest face, and an old woman I should take to be her grandmother."

"Farewell," said the Advocate, wrenching himself free. "Should we meet again I will pay you for your friendly services."

"Well said," replied Vanbrugh. "I am content. No man ever knew you to be false to your word. A woman perhaps—but that lies in the past. Ah, what a storm! It is as though the end of the world had come."

"To those whose minutes are numbered," said the Advocate between his set teeth, "the end of the world has come. Farewell once more."

"Farewell then," cried Vanbrugh, proceeding onward. "For my sake be careful of yourself. If this be not the Second Deluge I will seek you to-morrow."

"For me," muttered the Advocate, as he left Vanbrugh, "there may be no to-morrow."

Bearing in mind the words of Vanbrugh that he would meet his wife and Christian Almer lower down on the road, he looked out for them. He saw no trace of them, and presently he began to blunder in his course; he searched in vain for a familiar landmark, and he knew not in which direction the House of White Shadows was situated. Evening was fast approaching when he heard himself hailed by loud shouts. The sounds proceeded from a strongly-built stone hut, protected on three sides from wind and rain, and so placed that the water from the ranges rolled past without injuring it. Standing within the doorway was Fritz the Fool.

Thinking his wife might have sought shelter there, the Advocate made his way to it, and found therein assembled, in addition to Fritz, old Pierre Lamont, Mother Denise and her husband Martin, and their pretty granddaughter Dionetta.

"Welcome, comrade, welcome," cried Pierre Lamont. "It is pleasant to see a familiar face. We were compelled to fly from the villa, and Fritz here conveyed us here to this hospitable hut, where we shall be compelled

to stay till the storm ceases. Where is your fair lady?"

"It is a question I would ask of you," said the Advocate. "She is not here, then?"

"No. She left the villa before we did, in the company of your friend"—the slight involuntary accent he placed upon the word caused the Advocate to start as though he had received a blow—"Christian Almer. They have doubtless found another shelter as secure as this. We wished them to stop for us, but they preferred not to wait. Fritz had a hard job of it carrying me to this hut, which he claims as his own, and which is stored with provisions sufficient for a month's siege. I have robbed the old house of its servants—Dionetta here, for whom" (he dropped his voice) "the fool has a fancy, and her grandmother, whom I shall pension off, and Fritz himself—an invaluable fool. Fritz, open a bottle of wine; do the honours of your mansion. The Advocate is exhausted."

The Advocate did not refuse the wine; he felt its need to sustain his strength for the work he had yet to perform. He glanced round the walls.

"Is there an inner room?" he asked.

"Yes; there is the door."

"May I crave privacy for a few minutes?"

Pierre Lamont waved his hand, and the Advocate walked to the inner room, and closed the door upon himself.

"What has come over this man?" mused Pierre Lamont. "There is in his face, since yesterday, such a change as it is rare in life's experience to see. It is not produced by fatigue. Has he made discovery of his wife's faithlessness and his friend's treachery. And should I not behave honestly to him, and make him as wise as I am on events within my knowledge? What use? What use? But at least he shall know that the secret of Gautran's guilt is not his alone."

In the meantime the Advocate was taking advantage of the solitude for which he had been yearning since he left the bedside of Pauline. It was not until this moment that he could find an opportunity to examine the packet she had given him.

It contained what he imagined—the certificate of the birth of his child. He read it and mentally took note of the date and also of certain words written on the back, in confirmation of the story related to him by John Vanbrugh. No room was there for doubt. Madeline was his child, and by his means her murderer had escaped from justice.

“A just Heaven smote him down,” he thought; “so should retribution fall upon me. I am partner in his crime. Upon my soul lies guilt heavier than his.”

Within the certificate of birth was a smaller packet, which he had laid aside. He took it up now, and removed the paper covering. It was the portrait of his daughter, Madeline the flower-girl. The picture was that of a young girl just budding into womanhood—a girl whose laughing mouth and sparkling eyes conveyed to his heart so keen a torture that he gave utterance to a groan, and covered his eyes with his hand to shut out the reproach. But in the darkness he saw a vision which sent violent shudders through him—such a vision as had pursued Gautran in the lonely woods, as he had seen in the waving of branch and leaf, as had hovered over him in his prison cell, as he stood by his side in the courthouse during the trial from which he emerged a free man. Bitterly was this man, who had reached a height so lofty that it seemed as if calumny could not touch him, bitterly was he expiating the error of his youth.

He folded the portrait of his child within the certificate of birth, and replaced them in his pocket. Then, with an effort, he succeeded in summoning some kind of composure to his features, and the next minute he rejoined Pierre Lamont.

“You will remain with me,” said the old lawyer; “it will be best.”

“Nay,” responded the Advocate, “a plain duty lies before me. I must seek my wife.”

“She herself is doubtless in a place of shelter,” said Pierre Lamont, “and while this tempest is raging, devastating the land in every direction, you can scarcely hope to find her.”

“I shall find her,” said the Advocate in a tone of convic-

tion. "Stern fate, which has dogged my steps since I arrived in Geneva, and brought me to a pass which, were you acquainted with the details, would appear incredible to you, will conduct me to her side. Were I otherwise convinced I must not shrink from my duty."

"Outside these walls," urged Pierre Lamont, "death stares you in the face."

"There are worse things than death," said the Advocate, with an air of gloomy and invincible resolution.

"Useless to argue with such a man as yourself," said Pierre Lamont. He turned to Fritz. "Go, you and your friends, into the inner room for a while. I wish to speak in private with my friend."

"One moment," said the Advocate to the fool as he was preparing to obey Pierre Lamont. "You were the last to leave the House of White Shadows."

"We were the last humans," replied Fritz.

"In what condition was it at the time?"

"In a most perilous condition. The waters were rising around the walls. It had, I should say, not twelve hours to live."

"To live!" echoed Pierre Lamont, striving to impart lightness to his voice, and signally failing. "How do you apply that, Fritz?"

"Trees live!" replied Fritz, "and their life goes with the houses they help to build. If the walls of the old house we have run from could talk, mysteries would be brought to light."

"You have been my wife's maid," said the Advocate to Dionetta, as she was about to pass him. Dionetta curtsied. "Has she discharged you?"

Dionetta cast a nervous glance at Pierre Lamont, and another at Mother Denise. The old grandmother answered for her.

"I thought it as well," said Mother Denise, "in all respect and humility, that so simple a child as Dionetta should be kept to her simple life. My lady was good enough to give Dionetta a pair of diamond earrings and a diamond finger-ring, which we have left behind us." Fritz made a grimace. "These things are not fit for poor pea-

sants, and the pleasure they convey is a dangerous pleasure."

"You are not favourably disposed towards my wife," said the Advocate. Mother Denise was silent. "But you are right in what you say. Diamonds are not fit gifts for simple maids. I wish you well, you and your grandchild. It might have been——" The thought of his own child, of the same age as Dionetta, and as beautiful, crossed his mind. He brushed his hand across his eyes, and when he looked round the room again, he and Pierre Lamont were alone.

"A fool of fools," said Pierre Lamont, looking after Fritz. "If he and the pretty Dionetta wed—it will be a suitable match for beauty to mate with folly—he will be father to a family of fools who may, in their way, be wiser in their generation than you and I. Your decision is irrevocable?"

"It is irrevocable."

"If you do not find your wife you will endeavour to return to us?"

"I shall find her."

"And then?" asked Pierre Lamont with a singular puckering of his brows.

"And then?" echoed the Advocate absently, and added: "Who can tell what may happen from one hour to another?"

"How much does he know?" thought Pierre Lamont; "or are his suspicions but just aroused? There is a weight upon his soul which taxes all his strength. It is grand to see a strong man suffer as he is suffering. Is there a mystery in his trouble with which I am not acquainted? His wife—I know about her. Gautran—I know about him. But the stranger he left in his study in the middle of the night—a broken-down gentleman-vagabond, with a spice of wickedness in him—who is he, and what was his mission? Of one thing I must satisfy myself before I am assured that he is worthy of my compassion." Then he spoke aloud. "You said just now there are worse things than death."

"Aye."

"Disgrace?"

“In a certain form that may be borne, and life yet be worth the having.”

“Good. Dishonour?”

“It matters little,” said the Advocate; “but were the time not precious, I should be curious to learn why you desire to get at the heart of my secrets.”

“The argument would be too long,” said Pierre Lamont with earnestness, “but I can justify myself. There are worse things than death. Pardon me—an older man than yourself, and one who is well disposed towards you—for asking you bluntly whether such things have come to you?”

“They have. You can read the signs in my face.”

“But if you have a secret, the revealing of which would be hurtful to you, cannot the mischief be averted? As far as I can expect you have been frank with me. Frankness for frankness. Say that the secret refers to Gautran and to your defence of him?”

“I have been living in a fool’s paradise,” said the Advocate with a scornful smile. “To whom is this known?”

“To Fritz the Fool, and to me, through him. He saw Gautran in your study after the trial——”

“Have I been watched?”

“The discovery was accidental. He was moved by some love-verses I read to him, and becoming sentimental, he dallied outside Dionetta’s window, after the manner of foolish lovers. Then the lights of your study window attracted him, and he peeped through. When Gautran left the villa, Fritz followed him, and heard him in his terrified soliloquies proclaim his guilt. Were this to go out to the world, it would, according to its fashion, construe it in a manner which might be fatal to you. But Gautran is dead, and I can be silent, and can put a lock on Fritz’s tongue—for in my soul I believe you were not aware the wretch was guilty when you defended him.”

“I thank you. I believed him to be innocent.”

“Why, then, my mind is easy. Friend, shake hands. He held the Advocate’s hand in his thin fingers, and with something of wistfulness, said: “I would give a year of my life if I could prevail upon you to remain with us.”

“You cannot prevail upon me. So much being said

between us, more is necessary. The avowal of my ignorance of Gautran's guilt at the time I defended him—I learnt it after the trial, mind you—will not avail me. A written confession, sworn upon his dying oath, exists, which accuses me of that which the world will be ready to believe. Strange to say, this is my lightest trouble. There are others of graver moment which more vitally concern me—unknown to you, unless, indeed, you possess a wizard's art of divination."

"Comrade," said Pierre Lamont, slowly and with emphasis, "there breathes not in the world a woman worth the breaking of a man's heart."

"Stop!" cried the Advocate in a voice of agony.

In silence he and Pierre Lamont gazed upon each other, and in the old lawyer's face the Advocate saw that his wife's faithlessness and his friend's treachery were known.

"Enough," he said; "there is for me no deeper shame, no deeper dishonour."

And he turned abruptly from Pierre Lamont, and left the hut staggering like a drunken man.

"Fritz, Fritz!" cried Pierre Lamont. "Come quickly!" Fritz instantly made his appearance from the inner room. "Look you, Fritz," said the old lawyer, in hurried, excited tones, "the Advocate has gone upon his mad errand—has gone alone. After him at once, and if you can save him from the consequences of his desperate resolve—if you can advise, assist him, do so for my sake. Quick, Fritz, quick!"

"Master Lamont," said Fritz, "are you asking me to do a man's work?"

"Yes, Fritz—you can do no more."

"Well and good. As far as a man dare go, I will go; but if a madman persists in rushing upon certain death, it will not help him for a fool to follow his example. I am fond of life, Master Lamont, doubly fond of it just now, for reasons." He jerked his thumb over his shoulder to the room which contained Dionetta. "But I will do what can be done. You may depend upon me."

He was gone at least two hours, and when he returned he was exhausted and panting for breath.

“I was never born to be drowned,” he said, and he threw himself into a chair, and sat there, gasping.

“Well, Fritz, well?” cried Pierre Lamont.

“Wait till I get my breath. I followed this great Advocate as you desired, and for some time, so deep was he in his dreams, he did not know I was with him. But once, when he was waist high in water—not that he cared, it was as though he was inviting death—and I, who was acquainted with the road through which he was wading, pulled him suddenly back and so saved his life, he turned upon me savagely, and demanded who I was. He recognised me the moment he spoke the words—I will say this of him, that in the presence of another man he never loses his self-possession, and that, in my belief he would be a match for Death, if it presented itself to him in a visible, palpable shape. ‘Ah,’ said he, ‘you are Fritz the Fool; why do you dog me?’ ‘I do not dog you,’ I replied; ‘Master Lamont bade me guide and assist you, if you needed guidance and assistance. He is the only man for whom I would risk my life.’ ‘Honesty is a rare virtue,’ he said; ‘keep with me, then, for just as long as you think yourself to be safe. You saw my wife and Mr. Almer leave the House of White Shadows. Is it likely they took this road?’ ‘They could take no other, and live,’ I said, ‘but there is no trace of them. They must have turned back to the villa.’ ‘Could they reach it, do you think?’ he asked. ‘A brave man can do wonders,’ I replied; ‘some hours ago they may have reached it; but they could not stop in the lower rooms, which even at that time must have been below water-mark. I will not answer for the upper part of the house at this moment, and before morning it will be swept away.’ ‘Guide me as far on the road as you care to accompany me,’ said he, ‘and when you leave me point me out the way I should go.’ I did so, and we encountered dangers, and but for me he would not have been alive when I left him. We came to the bridge which spans the ravine of pines, two miles this side of the House of White Shadows. A great part of it had been torn away, and down below a torrent was rushing fierce enough to beat the life out of any living being, human or animal. ‘There is no other way but this,’ I said, ‘to the House of White

Shadows. I shall not cross the bridge.' He said no word, but struggled on to the bridge, which—all that was left of it—consisted of three slender trunks half hanging over the ravine. It was nothing short of a miracle that he got across; no sooner was he upon the other side than the remaining portion of the bridge fell into the ravine. He waved his hand to me, and I soon lost sight of him in the darkness. I stumbled here as well as I could. Master Lamont, I never want another journey such as that; had not the saints watched over me I should not be here to tell the tale. This is the blackest night in my remembrance."

"Do you think he can escape, Fritz?" asked Pierre Lamont.

"His life is not worth a straw," replied Fritz. "Look you here, Master Lamont. If I were to see him tomorrow, or any other day, alive, I should know that he is in league with the Evil One. No human power can save him."

"Peace be with him," said Pierre Lamont. "A great man is lost to us—a noble mind has gone."

"Master Lamont," said Fritz sententiously, "there is such a thing as being too clever. Better to be a simpleton than to be over-wise or over-confident. I intend to remain a fool to the end of my days. I have no pity for such a man. Who climbs must risk the fall. Not rocky peaks, but level ground, with bits of soft moss, for Fritz the Fool."

He slept well and soundly, but Pierre Lamont tossed about the whole of the night, thinking with sadness and regret upon the downfall of the Advocate.

CHAPTER V

THE DOOM OF THE HOUSE OF WHITE SHADOWS

AN unerring instinct guided him; a superhuman power possessed him; and at midnight—though he could keep no count of time—he found himself within the gates of the House of White Shadows. Upon his lips, contracted and spasmodic with pain and suffering,

appeared a pitiable smile as he gazed at a window on the upper floor, and saw a light. It was reflected from the window of Christian Almer's room.

"There they are," he muttered; "I shall not die unavenged."

The water was breast high. He battled through it, and reached the open door of the villa. Slowly he ascended the stairs until he arrived at the landing above. He listened at Christian Almer's door, but heard no sound. Enraged at the thought that they might, after all, have escaped him, he dashed into the room, and called out the names of his wife and friend. Silence answered him. He staggered towards the lamp, which stood on a table covered with a shade which threw the light downward. Before the lamp was a sheet of paper, with writing upon it, and bending over it the Advocate saw that it was addressed to him, and was intended for his perusal.

A steadier survey of the room brought its revelations. At the extreme end of the apartment lay a woman, still and motionless. He crept towards her, knelt by her, and lowered his face to hers. It was his wife, cold and dead!

A rosy tint was in her cheeks; a smile was on her lips; her death had brought no suffering with it.

"Fair and false," he said. "Beauty is a sinful possession."

Her clothes were wet, and he knew that she had been drowned.

Then, turning, he saw what had before escaped his notice—the body of Christian Almer, lying near the table. He put his ear to Almer's heart and felt a slight beating.

"He can wait," muttered the Advocate. "I will first read what he has written."

He was about to sit at the table when he heard a surging sound without. He stepped into the passage, and saw the waters swaying beneath him.

"It is well," he thought. "In a little while all will be over for those who have sinned."

This reflection softened him somewhat toward those who lay within the room, and by whom he believed himself to have been wronged. Was he not himself the greatest

sinner in that fatal house? He returned to the table and read what Christian Almer had written.

“EDWARD:

“I pray that these words may reach your eyes. Above all things on earth have I valued your friendship, and my heart is wrung with anguish by the reproach that I have not been worthy of it. Last night, when your wife and I parted, I knew that you had discovered the weak and treacherous part I have played towards you, for as I turned towards my room—at that very moment, looking downward, I saw you below. I did not dare to come to you—I did not dare to show my face to the man I had wronged. It was my intention to fly this morning from your presence and hers, and never to see you more; and also to write to you the words to which, by the memory of all that I hold sacred, I now solemnly swear—that the wrong I have done you is compassed by sentiment. I do not seek to excuse myself; I know that treachery in thought is as base between you and me, as treachery in act. Yet in all humbleness I implore you to endeavour to find some palliation, though but the slightest, of my conduct in the reflection that sometimes in the strongest men—even in such a man as yourself, whose mind and life are most pure and noble—error cannot be avoided. We are hurried into wrong by subtle forces which wither one’s earnest endeavours to step in the right path. Thus it has been with me. If you will recall certain words which were spoken in our conversation at midnight in the room in which this is written, you will understand what was meant when I said that I flew to the mountains to rid myself, by a happy chance, of a terror which possessed me. You who have never erred, you who have never sinned, may not be able to find it in your heart to forgive me. If it be so, I bow my head to your judgment—which is just, as in all your actions you are known to be. But if you cannot forgive me, I entreat you to pity me.

“You were not in the house to-day when we endeavoured to escape to a place of shelter in which we should be protected from this terrible inundation. We did not succeed—we were beaten back; and being engulfed in a sud-

den rush of waters, I could not save your wife. The utmost I could do was to bear her lifeless body back to this fatal house. It was I who should have died, not she; but my last moments are approaching. Think kindly of her if you can.

“CHRISTIAN ALMER.”

Had he not been absorbed, not only in the last words written by Christian Almer, but by the reflections which they engendered, the Advocate would have known that the floods were increasing in volume, and that, in the short time he had been in the house, the waters had risen several feet. But he was living an inner life—a life in which the spiritual part of himself was dominant.

He stepped to the body of his wife and said:

“Poor child! Mine the error.”

Then he knelt by the side of Christian Almer, and raised him in his arms. Aroused to consciousness by the action, Almer opened his eyes. They rested upon the Advocate’s face vacantly, but presently they dilated in terror.

“Be not afraid,” said the Advocate, “I have read what you have written. I know all.”

“I am very weak,” murmured Christian Almer. “Do not torture me; say that you pity me.”

“I pity and forgive you, Christian,” replied the Advocate in a very gentle voice.

“Thank God! Thank God!” said Almer, and closed his eyes, from which the warm tears gushed.

“God be merciful to sinners!” murmured the Advocate.

When daylight broke, the House of White Shadows, and all that it contained, had been swept from the face of the earth. A bare waste was all that remained to mark the record of human love and human ambition.

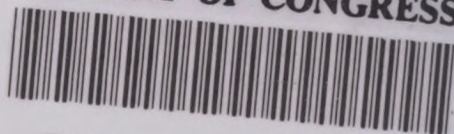
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